

THE VALIANT STRAIN

The hardbitten Dragoons in the Cascade country of Oregon have just lost their hero-leader, killed in a skirmish against the Indians. They believe no one adequate to replace him—and when they see their new commanding officer, a boy-man, a white-gloved 'drillmaster, their belief is confirmed. 'Gloves' Graham, they call him, and they despise him.

Lieutenant Graham's pride forbids him to make any move to win his men's affection and respect. His Sergeant, Ralph Adams, bends over backwards to give him the chances for it, and his wife does her best. Only the reader is aware of the true reason for the young man's stiffness and reserve. And only the reader understands the drive behind the heroism eventually shown by 'Gloves', which leaves even the Dragoons in awe.

This is a fine and moving novel of America's Indian war, and one which portrays most vividly that inborn pride which distinguished the mounted arm.

THE VALIANT STRAIN

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TO MY MOTHER

PROLOGUE

WAR came suddenly to Oregon in the year 1885. Its signs had been there but the emigrants had not wanted to believe them. The Indians told of hearing the ground speak, telling them they had no right to sell the land given them by the Great Spirit. Squatted warriors stopped making the slender hunting points; and the short sharp blades of the war arrow began appearing. Leschi, the Nasquallan, crossed the mountains from his Pacific lodges and began preaching his crusade of rapine and murder to the inland tribes. With the dying strength of his race he travelled day and night like a prophet among them, along the thawed Columbia from the Cascades to the Walla Walla, even south into Shoshonee country where the great Snakes lived. He was eloquent and persuasive and told the fire councils of false treaties and the terrible *polakly illeha*, the land of death and no sunlight where the whites would carry all Indians to die. Kamiakin and Casino and other chiefs listened. The Nasquallan knew the real god and spoke Big Medicine. His talk was true. The red man had become as the white's shadow, moved by him when he moved and forever shielded from the sun. And their Yakimas and Klickitats, who had wronged and been wronged, made their own peace for war. The killing efficacy of their warrior union swept across the Territory as fire moves through an October field. As in all Indian wars, the penalty fell heaviest on the innocent, both red and white.

AFTER the surprise massacre at the Cascades it became a personal war to Sergeant Adams. It was not just the impassioned, wild-eyed feeling of new soldiers who have seen a friend die. Adams was thirty-six. He had acquired a professional detachment for war and death after seventeen years against the Sioux and Apache and Kiowa, and even the Mexicans at Monterey, where the only attack order was Jack Hays waving his pistol towards the enemy cavalry and shouting, 'Give 'em Hell!'

To Ralph Adams, who'd been an eight-dollar-a-month pony soldier, a dragoon who had seen the best and the worst and a little of the in-between, a new and deep-running anger had come with the brutal death of Captain Canby. It was still a professional's feeling, not wild and uncontrolled; but it lurked inside him with the patience of the male puma waiting for a target big enough to satisfy its demand.

And now at the Dalles landing, where the Columbia turned wide against the ranging Cascade Mountains, he leaned forward on his horse and hunched his long shoulders together and felt the stirring inside him. Never completely gone, it was suddenly strong as he watched the small steamer coming around in the river channel towards the landing, and he remembered another steamer and the Cascades and the end of the best man he'd ever known. His dark, unshaved face tightened, bleak again as he waited for the captain's replacement, a man who could not change

anything because he could not make the captain live again.

He watched the *Wasco* churning in the spreading water track, cross-river, two days late making the forty miles up-river from the Cascades where she met the overland portage from Fort Vancouver, Hudson Bay headquarters on the coast.

The rider next to him moved impatiently; his voice was softly southern. 'Guess our freedom is over. That sailarin' looks mighty easy, Adams. Maybe we ought to be there 'stead of the army.'

Adams turned on the gelding. The grin in his blackish, Indian-like eyes did not quite take his mouth. 'You forgettin' you got no stomach for river boats, or water?'

But he knew what Roan meant. Yes, it had become free and loose with no officer. But he knew it was more than that, knew the men pretended it was losing the unaccustomed liberty because none of the company wanted to talk about anybody replacing the captain.

'You see him anywhere?' Roan asked.

'No.'

'Maybe he ain't comin', Adams.'

'He's comin'.'

Sergeant Adams took the dispatch from his uniform and didn't button the pocket. 'Edward Shirley Graham,' he said, looking at it. 'New john. Could be anythin'.'

They moved their horses closer to the landing as the river steamer frothed against the current, her outlines flatly sunlighted as she broke from the shadow of the climbing spines of the high gorge on the far side. Adams hunched over again, a big man in the blue dragoon uniform, its orange trim soiled, a look of use to him, tall, with long heavy thighs.

'You think he's goin' to be as good?' Roan's Carolina accent couldn't soften the doubt.

Adams thought of the captain. The spread flash of teeth and broad-knuckled soldier's hands swinging the Sharps, scattering Yakimas the way grasshoppers go up when you walk through low weeds.

'No.'

The word repeated itself, a kind of echo, staying in the edges of his consciousness. The scurrying figures of the river men grew smaller and indistinguishable and he was hearing the captain's laughter once more. . . .

They were leaving Dalles; and when Adams had asked the captain about the dispatch he had laughed and kidded about it, calling it a message from the department of caution at Vancouver.

Then he handed it across to Adams as they rode together. He shifted the carbine he had slung over his shoulder like the rest of the patrol behind them, and plucked at the layered collar of his jacket. It was opened loosely two buttons down, the way he wore it in the field, the blond hair curling up thickly from the neck of the red undershirt.

'You have to interpret these things,' he said, and laughed again. 'You always want to read a dispatch two or three times, Adams. You have to be sure of the right meaning. You have one idea and I have another from reading the same one.'

'Yessir, but with the rest of the regiment comin' up to Dalles it sounds like they don't want us doin' any skirmishin' alone.'

But he knew then the captain wasn't going to wait, if it came down to it. He had heard one of the staff up at regiment once say the captain was a little wild. Maybe he did have his loose times, Adams thought; but he gave the

sitters-and-thinkers that never left Kansas their money's worth.

And when they turned on patrol away from the river the youngster from the Cascades blockhouse rode up with the story of the Yakima attack on the settlement. His horse was blowing saliva, its nose rings and flanks going from the hard ride, as the kid told them the Yakimas had crossed the river below the Cascades and surprised them about daybreak. The Indians had fired the settlement and the steamer which was tied up at the landing.

'We were still holding the blockhouse and the landing when I left,' the young dragoon told them. 'If they can get the fire out on the boat they're going to try and get the womenfolk and kids that're left on her and come up-river.'

'How many in the party?' Canby asked him.

The youthful soldier's eyes walled around. 'Oh, Lord, Captain, more'n I want to see like that. A hundred and fifty, maybe more. Two chiefs with 'em.'

'Who? Do you know?'

'Kamiatkin, and one of the boys said the other was Owahi. He led 'em in.'

Captain Truman Canby sat momentarily on his horse, pondering; and Adams knew he was thinking of the message from Fort Vancouver. If he attacks with only what we've got in this patrol we stand to get whipped and lose most of us. And he might be standing up to a court for not going back to Dalles for the regiment.

He saw the captain looking back along the paired column behind them, fifteen men in all. He had split his company a hundred times, two parts making the Indians believe there were soldiers all along the river. It was risky, but it had always worked. Sometimes, though, the coin comes up on the other side, Adams thought.

'You fall in back there in column, son,' he told the youthful dragoon. 'See the ordnance corporal if you're short cartridges.'

As the other rode off Adams asked, 'We goin' to attack, Cap'n?'

'You want to as much as me but you think it's wrong, don't you, Adams?'

'It's a hard one, all right, with them other instructions.'

'They're all hard.'

'This one could get you a court.'

'I know.'

'Ain't none of us want that, Cap'n. We don't like leavin' Roan and them others down at the Cascades, neither.'

'It isn't your problem.' His smile barely moved his mouth. 'When you get in a box you built yourself, you have to get out by yourself.'

'Yessir. I'll ready up the men. How you figger to go in?'

'We'll hit them from behind and try to get some sort of perimeter around the blockhouse and the boat landing. Try and hold it long enough to get the civilians out on the steamer.'

When they reached the Middle Cascades the dragoons and the settlers were still holding the blockhouse and the landing where the *Mary* was tied up. Most all the cabins and frames around the settlement were burning, the smoke mushrooming and obscuring the whole area. A thin rail of orderly smoke was rising from the boat's stack but the steamer seemed to be afire on one side.

Canby led them in, pointing about with the barrel of his carbine as they cleared the bordering foliage and rode down on the Yakimas. They shot from their horses with the carbines and when the loads were gone they switched to the long Colt hand guns. The Yakimas had left their

ponies on the other side of the river when they sneaked across before daylight; and, crouching on foot, they were caught between the fires from the blockhouse and the landing and the dragoons coming down behind them. They scattered and began running for the woods around the settlement.

There were cheers from the blockhouse as the Indians withdrew and left a dozen or more of their warriors behind. Adams got his men making a barricade between the boat landing and the blockhouse and stopped by it, leaning down to yell in one of the firing ports.

'Any womenfolk or kids in there, get 'em movin' down to the steamer!'

'Where you been, Sarjint?' Roan called from inside. His blackened and sweaty face appeared in the slit, a happy, grinning gargoyle. 'We've had more'n our share of Injuns around here.'

The gelding moved with the noise and shots and Adams pulled back to the slit.

'How many men you got?'

'Four that can fight and two wounded. Two dead.'

'Come on out and we'll go see if there's anybody left in them houses.'

Roan came out; Adams gave his horse to one of the other dragoons; and together the two of them ran between the burning houses towards the two-story missionary home a few hundred feet away. Bodies of the settlers were sprawled where some had been killed at their early morning work. Yakimas were still foraging around the houses; and as they neared the missionary place Roan shouted to Adams, shooting quickly. A Yakima brave fell forward in the window of one of the cabins, his hand still clasp^{ing} the bow.

They ducked past the open doorway of the missionary

house and then inside, holding their pistols. As they neared the bottom landing of the stairs a Yakima looked down at them, startled, surprised that there were any soldiers left. Adams had time to lay his Colt over his arm and shoot deliberately; the Indian slipped against the railing and slid halfway down the steps with the banister under his armpit.

Roan and Sergeant Adams ran upstairs past him and met two more warriors in the hallway. Adams shot one and Roan wrestled with the other as Adams thrust into the bedroom where there were two young girls and another Yakima. One of the girls, her clothing torn, had crawled under the bed and was screaming and trying to hide. The Yakima had forced the other girl against the wall, his hand over her face as she fought him.

Sergeant Adams came behind him and pulled him off the girl, swinging the weighted barrel of the army pistol in an arc, its sight ripping along the Yakima's neck. The brave loosed his tomahawk, stared at Adams and tried to rise. Adams's booted feet moved twice in levering kicks. The red man, he was thinking, only wants his land.

As Roan came in the room, the girl still stood against the wall, holding her arms over the front of her. Adams pulled the covers off the bed and handed one to her and another to the girl who was sliding out from under the bed.

'Wrap yourselves up and come on!' he told them. 'Hurry.'

They rushed downstairs with the two girls and one of them tried to break away towards the kitchen. They saw the missionary lying across the door jamb between the rooms, his head scalped. Sergeant Adams stepped after the girl and caught her but she struggled and fought him, her long hair pulled loose and stringing across her face.

'You can't help him no more,' Adams said, holding

her. 'Ain't nothin' to what they wanted you for.' It was coarse but he had to shock her.

He half carried her out the door and caught up with Roan and the other girl. They left both of them at the landing with the remaining settlers and forayed through a couple more of the cabins that were not already burning.

When they returned Captain Canby and the dragoons had set up a perimeter around the landing, tied in to the blockhouse. Adams saw that the river men had stopped the fire on the boat and were slopping river water over the charred, smoking wood. The Yakimas under Owahi were re-forming and they could see them around the limits of the clearing, under the hachuring screen of trees and interlacing bushes.

'They've got us down to a pretty small perimeter,' the captain told him.

Adams squatted beside him, thinking how it was all going to end here, without ever being able to settle anything with the Yakimas for this massacre.

'Looks like my philosophy about messages is wrong,' Canby said. His wide and darkly freckled face moved and his teeth showed briefly. 'I've been adding up, Adams, and I come up with a lot of minuses.'

Then the Yakimas came. The steamer threw off the lines and started out into the river with the settler families, and the Yakimas came.

But they had not surprised anyone this time and coming on foot there was no sudden rush. They came in a long line of braves, but there were only a few Hudson Bays among them and the carbines of the dragoons and the settlers' long rifles outranged the Yakima bows. The lance, with which they were best of all, was useless to them without their ponies they had left on the other side of the wide Columbia.

With all their bravery in advancing against the men, in the blockhouse and around the boat landing, they could not stand up well to the fixed and steady rifle fire. Their attack did not carry the landing and they broke off, their arrows flailing like air spikes as they volleyed them towards the steamer and the men on the landing. Canby moved along the defences and rearranged the men left. The perimeter drew in a few hundred feet more, now probably thirty yards long and twenty deep at the widest part.

Canby signalled Adams; and he crawled towards him; and together they crouched behind the wooden dumb-boy. The captain looked around the small semi-circle of remaining dragoons and the men from the settlement who had stayed.

'Make sure the civilians have horses,' he said. He paused, recharging the carbine. 'Some of our boys won't be needing theirs.'

'Yessir.'

'Adams?'

'Cap'n?'

'It's important to the army for some of us to get out. We've got to reach Dalles and get the regiment to send up a force to meet the steamer; a lot of those people are hurt. We've got to let them know we don't hold the portage here any more. The Yakimas will ambush here as long as they can, knowing the emigrant and settler traffic has to pass through here.'

'This piece of river is one we need,' Adams answered. 'Guess that's why they set this attack up so careful like.'

'Pass the word to mount up and ride out on signal, Adams.'

As Adams nodded, the next Yakima assault started. They stormed the blockhouse and ducked under the firing ports and threw smoking rags inside. The blockhouse

fell and the dragoons who escaped fought through the surrounding Indians to the landing. The bugle was a clear, sudden sound.

As, they all started mounting, Canby yelled, 'Make your way to Dalles. Good luck, boys!'

His stallion leaped ahead and he waved the Sharps in his big hand and the remaining men rode after him. Their horses spread in a widely spaced charge through the Yakimas, some falling from their horses as they broke through and galloped towards the trees and foliage. But Owahi had kept half his warriors back, hidden along the edges of the woods; and as the horsemen slowed, seeking trail through the bushes and underbrush, the Yakimas were waiting.

The other part of the Indian force turned now and came running behind the mounted riders who had stopped and were caught at the fringes of the woods. The concentric rings of Yakimas closed; and the soldiers and civilians with them were dragged from their horses and swiftly killed there in the hot May afternoon.

Sergeant Adams wrestled a warrior who had leaped on the gelding behind him. He pulled away from the slicing tomahawk, smelling the bear grease on the Yakima, and twisted around and pushed the end of his revolver against the other's body. The Yakima jerked with the heavy pistol's impact, and Adams rode over another Indian who was trying to grab the horse's bridle. Then he was on a road-trail into the trees. It was hours later when he ran on Roan and another dragoon, the three of them the only ones who had broken through the Yakima trap, . . .

Sitting on his horse beside Roan now, Adams remembered going back with the regiment to retake the portage.

They had found the captain. The empty Sharps was a few feet away from him, its stock splintered. His blue, sun-streaked uniform was shredded from the mutilation of knives and lances, and naked slices of his big body showed through. There was an unbelievable number of arrows sticking in his chest and stomach.

Maybe he had been a little wild sometimes, Adams thought. Maybe Trew Canby hadn't had all the spit and trim an officer ought to. But you looked at him sometimes on the stallion he wouldn't let nobody geld, his feet out of the stirrup irons, carrying his carbine over a shoulder, and you knew he hadn't had to wave no diploma around to show you why he had a line company.

He realized suddenly that Roan was talking to him. 'There he is, Adams, Comin' off now.'

Adams saw the young officer and the girl come down the planking from the *Wasco*. The orange pompom on top the dress Albert hat and the trimming on his uniform were bright and new even from where they looked from their horses. This was a long knife? This was a chief of long knives? A dragoon officer? God, Adams thought. He was almost the same height as the young girl, slightly taller, weighed maybe a hundred and ten, fifteen. Adams decided. No bigger than a wagon boy.

Roan sensed it, too. While they were still too far away to hear him he sang in his low sliding voice:

Oh, the dragoon bold he knows no care,
As he rides along with his uncropped hair.

Sergeant Adams glanced at him. He grinned narrowly, losing it as the couple came nearer and stopped in front of the two horses. The young man's hand half moved to his hat and paused, waiting. Adams looked past the gelding's bridle at the small officer standing there in the new

dragoon uniform, the blue jacket fitting tightly around the slender waist and tapering chest, the second lieutenant arcs glittering fresh. A model toy soldier, Adams thought, and did not salute.

'It's awkward waiting for your salute.'

Adams gestured at his visor then and shifted himself in the saddle. He looked at the slim, black-haired girl behind the lieutenant. 'We only brought one horse. Didn't expect no ladies comin' up to Dalles right now, way things are.'

'Sergeant, please dismount when you're talking to an officer on foot.'

'Yessir.' He swung down in his scuffed jackboots, his six and a half feet towering over the other.

'You're the senior non-commissioned officer who has had charge of the company?'

Adams was still examining him and in his detachment almost missed the question. He nodded. 'Name's Adams, Lieutenant. Most of the company's here at Dalles. We left six men at the Cascades blockhouse after we retook it from the Yakimas.'

'I know. I saw them when we came through there from Vancouver. I'm Lieutenant Graham.' He stepped back very precisely a measured military pace and exchanged salutes again. 'You are relieved of temporary command of the company, Sergeant. Don't forget to make the note in your day report.'

Sergeant Adams saluted and thought, God, this is eastern garrison, almost like presidential drill. He's going to be one, all right. The people around the landing must think we're doing some big ceremony. And, by God, they're right.



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'ROAN AND ME can ride double so the lady can have a horse to herself,' Adams told the lieutenant. 'That is if she's goin' to camp with us. There ain't no ladies in camp.'

The officer brought the dark-haired young girl beside him. She was well-formed, a lithe grace in her. 'Sergeant Adams, this is Mrs Graham. She will go back with us but there is no need for one of you to give up your own horse. A civilian is not entitled to government animals. She can ride double with me.'

Corporal Roan had dismounted while they were talking, and the lieutenant introduced him very formally. It was unfamiliar and surprising to him, as it had been for Adams, and he stood there afterwards uneasily, glancing around at Adams.

'We'll go up and get the horse,' Adams said.

'All right, Sergeant,' the lieutenant said. 'Mrs Graham and I will finish clearing our baggage with the captain on the steamer.'

Adams saw the suggestive wait again and reluctantly his big hand touched his cap visor before he got up on the gelding.

'We're all goin' to have sore arms with *him*,' Roan said to Adams as they rode away from the officer to where they had left the other horse. Adams didn't say anything.

'You think he knows how it is around Dalles?' Roan asked as he untied the extra horse they had brought for

the officer and drew the animal in behind his. 'Injups killin' all along the river, it don't seem like no fit place for her.'

'Officers got a right to do what they want,' Adams said laconically. 'Even new lieutenants.'

'Guess he's got all kinds of rules stuck in his head. Civilians can't have no 'army horses,' Roan mimicked. 'I didn't know that, Adams.' Then something struck him and he smiled to himself. 'His own wife.'

'He believes what he believes.'

'You ain't goin' to tell him he ought to send her back to Vancouver?'

'No.'

'Most all the womenfolk have left, outside the missionaries.'

'Regulations don't say nothin' about enlisted men advisin' their officers.'

Roan slowed; the other horse bumped his and shouldered around alongside. Roan looked at Adams. 'You mad, Adams? You mad because he come?'

'No. I had to send the message to Vancouver about losin' our officer, didn't I?'

'I am,' the other said and walked his horse after Adams. 'He can't hold no candle to the Cap'n. He don't look like no dragoon officer. Hell, he ain't as big as your fist, Adams.'

Sergeant Adams continued on a little ahead of him and didn't answer.

When they returned with the horse, Lieutenant Graham and his wife were over at the far end of the landing, where the hewn timbers were staked with lines to the basaltic rock bordering the river. They stood there looking at the partly burned steamer that had come up-river from the Cascades with the settlers who escaped the

massacre. The small *Mary* now lay half underwater on the river shoals. Like the *Wasco* which had brought the Grahams, she had been used to make the forty-mile run of the navigable part of the Columbia between the Dalles and the Cascades portage down-river.

The *Mary* was greening along the bowed hull that stuck up from the water, with three weeks of drifting mud around her and the boilers filled with river water. She lay where they had grounded her near the bank when she steamed up somehow with her living and dead. Some of the cabins were scorched frames where the Yakimas had fired her; and clusters of their slim arrows were still sticking where they had imbedded, the feathered ends bobbing now and then when the current rocked the steamer.

Adams saw the girl's hand go across her mouth as Graham turned to say something to her. After a few minutes they walked back towards the enlisted men. As they approached, Mrs. Graham's face was controlled and showed nothing of the violence she had seen by the landing.

The lieutenant did not ask about the burned steamer. He took the reins of his horse and swung up with riding hall grace, a perfection of arc as the slender booted leg went over the saddle and nipped inside the stirrup in a continuous movement. His hand rubbed along the saddle leather, which had been tended and polished, and Adams saw him quickly look over the rest of the tack and hand reins.

Then he held down his arm and before Sergeant Adams could move to help, Mrs Graham was up behind her husband, her long skirts falling over the horse's rump.

'Have the corporal arrange to bring out our things on a wagon,' Graham said.

For a moment Adams wondered why he didn't tell Roan directly. But this was chain of command, he remembered. This was a paragraph of the manual; this was Edward Shirley Graham. He told Roan, who stood holding the lieutenant's horse, wondering if Roan felt as foolish hearing it again as he did telling it.

They rode away with Adams leading, their horses' hoofs scudding up the dry dirt on the road from the boat landing. This was going to be real soldierly, Adams told himself. This one hardly had the smell of the Hudson off him and he was going to run the dragoons by the book. He thought of the captain bulking on his seventeen and a half hands of horse and grinning like an animal and Adams's slim red lips drew a distant smile. He could see E. S. Graham riding against the mountain Yakimas. He'd probably quote the principles of war at them and expect to engage Kamiakin in individual sabre drill.

Behind the two men and one woman the Oregon sun lighted the steppes of stone capped by whiter stone, which was the Dalles, the doughy ridges going up to the high Cascade summits, and it cast a bright glaze across the broad Columbia where the trough of the incoming *Wasco* had long disappeared.

Adams loosed his hands and began to gallop the large gelding as they reached the top of the slope where the Dalles settlement began. Graham slowly pulled alongside him.

'Can't gallop,' he shouted over. 'Sorry. Too hard on the horse carrying double.'

Adams reined quickly. It scored silently with him, and he did not want it to because this small officer looked less like a dragoon than anything he had ever seen. He thought of the men back at the camp waiting for their new officer. God, he told himself the fourth time.

'I thought there were six companies here at the Dalles,' the lieutenant said, riding beside him.

'Colonel took five of 'em and went up-river lookin' for Kamiakin,' Adams answered. 'Left our company here.'

'I'd like to see the mission he gave the company when we reach camp.'

'It ain't wrote down,' Adams said, thinking Graham would expect a nice, formal, written mission. 'He just told us to hold the landin's at the Cascades and here at Dalles. Figgers Kamiakin's main force is up-river somewhere round Walla Walla.'

His short reply didn't suggest the grim fighting with the war party at the Cascades blockhouse or the ambushes or the way he had been running the company, fighting like Indians fought, squads of dragoons riding out in war parties and killing Yakimas and Klickitats wherever they found them, as many as they could.

When they rode into the company area there wasn't anyone outside except two shirtless soldiers who watched in awe as the lieutenant, with his wife riding double behind him, passed. *Well, Adams thought, it's President Pierce's fault, not mine. I didn't send him out here.* But he was their sergeant and somehow he felt responsible.

The bugler came from the orderly room and took their horses as they dismounted at the officer's quarters, which were next to the orderly room and low blockhouse. Lieutenant Graham looked back where they had seen the two men in their red undershirts, but they had disappeared. He saw, though, the picket and the line of horses standing a short distance below the camp.

'Where are the picket guards?'

Adams paused, looking down from his height with his

hat giving him a full four inches more. There should be sentries. He knew it. Mountain Indians were not any different from Sioux or Kiowa; they liked having dragoons about, too. He was angry with himself that it had to be Graham who caught it.

'There ain't none, Lieutenant. I didn't post none.'

'Do so, Sergeant. Post them immediately.' And it came. The eighth principle of war. 'You know how important surprise can be.'

'Yessir,' Adams said.

'While you're picking a detail, tell the men I'd like them to begin wearing their sabres again. We're not infantry, Sergeant. I'd like this company to look like First Dragoons.'

'Yessir,' Adams answered again, mostly with his lips because his teeth were set a little together.

Mrs Graham stood beside her husband and watched as Sergeant Adams left. She turned and smiled, her face coloured from the wind during the ride and yet with contradicting fragileness, the small-formed bones of English-Irish stock. Angela Graham was slender, the bosom that of a young girl and the wet-looking, clear bloom of youth in her dark hair and mouth.

'They've been fighting out here a long time,' she said. 'Don't you think you were hard on them when you just arrived? I mean, you're new, Ed. You've just been commissioned.'

'They haven't had an officer in the company for nearly a month.' He paused and looked out across the small company riding field. 'Since Trew.' Graham suppressed whatever he was thinking and turned back to her. 'I can't make excuses for myself, for coming. That's weak, Angela.'

'They're not new soldiers. That sergeant looks like he

has always been in the army. They've had experience fighting Indians.'

'You can't let that control you, make your decisions that way. I don't think even Trew, as liberal as he was, believed you could. If the army held that, there would be no need to school any of us. We would get our training on the battlefield. It might be too late when men depend on you.'

He had his belief. She had seen it in the courtship, the few weeks they had been married. His convictions about discipline sometimes made him machined and different, impenetrable. It was hard to get what she meant past it. She smiled again. 'You sound like a very new lieutenant.'

Graham smiled, and for a change, it came easily, 'I am.'

He opened the cabin door and followed her inside. It was bigger than most, with a narrow kitchen built off the original part and a wall formed of frame wood making a second room with an open doorway. There was a double iron bed in it. The cabin had been cleaned and the pine flooring was smoothly splintered from mopping. Someone had put a picture of President Pierce on the wall beside the door, a horseshoe nail shoved in the chink of clay between the logs and twisted over to hold it.

Lieutenant Graham unfastened his sword belt with the sabre and long-barrelled .44 calibre pistol on it and laid them on the table, watching Angela. He saw her face and knew she didn't understand what he had tried to tell her outside.

'Every man has his own ideas about how he should do things,' he told her. 'Two masons don't think the same about the way they should put down stones. It's like that with Trew and me. It's his old company, but I've got to start with them the way I think is right.'

'But he was easy with a soldier, friendly, not so cold, Ed. He was well liked and still a good officer. I want you to be well liked. That's all.'

He pulled off his gloves, folded them carefully, and put them beside the belt on the table. She had come pretty close to the whole thing, he thought, and it wasn't easy for him not to tell her. But he delayed it, as he had been delaying, for he knew she had been close to Trew, too.

'He was older and had more experience in the army, I guess he was one of the best combat officers in the service. I would like sometime to have the reputation out here that he did.'

'I can't see why you have always felt that way and yet thought it was wrong because he was easy and unconcerned about some things,' Angela said, regarding him intently. 'When he came east after you started in the Academy he said you should relax, try not to be so formal and stiff and disciplined about everything.'

'I know. He said everyone took things too seriously in the army.'

'I'm not asking you to be like him. I love *you*, Ed, not some image of Trew.'

'But we're different, Angela. We were always different, even growing up, I guess. When he was already a first lieutenant and I was trying to get into the Point, we had different ideas about how an officer should be.'

'I want you to be different. But since he was killed you are more stiff and disciplined than you ever were. You've become almost obsessed with it, Ed? Why? Why does it have to be like that?'

When he did not answer she moved closer to him. 'I'm your wife, Ed; and I saw how they looked with you telling the sergeant to get down from his horse and all. It wasn't what you said but as if you didn't give them any

credit for knowing what to do. I don't know much of the army but I am sure it's not supposed to be that way with officers and the men he's with.'

She did not understand and he could not blame her because it was not something that broke nicely apart in even pieces that could be sorted and counted. And he couldn't expect her to know how he felt the need for discipline. This must probably be the first reach in being married to someone, he thought, like the first low jump in the equestrian circle, and you somehow got over it together or you both fell to the side.

'You're entitled to know,' he said. 'Maybe you won't look at it the way I do. I read the after-action report on the Cascades fighting; first I thought it was the army whitewashing themselves for the Yakima massacre and the soldiers they lost. I was angry and hurt. It sounded cruel to read it in the cold way reports are written and not see any of the other things I knew about Trew.'

'They couldn't blame him for anything. He was killed in it.'

'That's how I felt. But I studied it, Angela, every part of it. It showed that he had ignored instructions from his regiment, that his recklessness cost him his life as well as the men with him.'

Angela saw he looked unhappy. 'I don't know about army reports,' she said, 'but he was killed helping save the people who lived there and the soldiers we talked to at the Cascades didn't think it was wrong.'

'No one ever questioned his courage.'

'It seems so unfair, Ed. When he was killed.'

'Yes.' Graham stopped, thoughtful, his eyes with an odd lack of focus and not seeing anything. 'The report was written by experienced line officers, not interested in crucifying anyone or purifying themselves. It's intended

to help the army learn from every engagement or skirmish, avoid the same mistakes. All through it is that kind of wild, independent way he was, God help me for saying it, Angela, about my own stepbrother, but he always thought he was big enough to get himself and his men out of anything. It killed him.'

They both stood a moment near the cabin doorway. 'Can't you see why discipline means so much to me when I knew Trew might still be alive if it had meant more to him? That's why it's important that I somehow make them understand that they don't simply shoot and ride on the first Indian they see?'

It was said and Angela's face softened, a sympathy for him coming in her. She put her arm around his shoulders, her head near his. 'I can see how it must have been, reading it, and now going through it all again.' She pushed him away to see his face. 'But I don't want it to distort you. Affect everything you do or believe. Because I want you to be liked, Ed.'

They heard someone on the step outside the door he had left open and he walked over and looked out. Corporal Roan was standing there with the wagon and their baggage drawn up behind him, another dragoon on the seat. He touched his cap.

'Boyd and me brought your things, Lieutenant. You want us to bring 'em in now?'

'Yes, Corporal, please.' Graham turned and glanced inside the cabin and said, 'Put the trunk in the bedroom there. The other bags you can leave in the room here.'

The tall, skinny youngster on the wagon jumped down and picked up the leather bag from the side of the wagon and carried it inside. Then Roan and he slid the trunk off the back and between them they carried it into the bedroom and put it down. Angela went into the bedroom

and began unpacking it, taking out the tray and pushing it over on the bed, while the young dragoon named Boyd brought the remaining two bags in.

'That's all we picked up, Lieutenant,' Roan said, watching the other soldier bringing the last one inside. 'Boyd'll stay and bring the wagon back.'

As the corporal turned to leave, Graham noticed the trailing empty rings for the sabre scabbard on his belt. 'There's an order being posted about wearing sabres, Corporal. Sergeant Adams will tell you about it.'

'Sabres?'

'You'll get used to them again,' Lieutenant Graham told him.

After he left, the young soldier who had come with him pulled down the sleeve of his undersize jacket and wiped his sweat off of one of the bags. He straightened.

'Anythin' else you want done, Lieutenant?'

'No, thank you. Are you going to be the orderly?'

'Yessir.'

'What's your name?'

'Boyd, sir. Private Boyd.'

'Is that the uniform they gave you?'

'Yessir. I'm sort of hard on fittin'.'

'You get it fixed somewhere, in Dalles, maybe. I'll pay for the cost.'

'Yessir.' He was grinning slightly.

'How long have you been with the company?'

'Bout six weeks, sir.'

'Nobody ever said anything to you about your uniform?'

Boyd shifted his feet, gangling, almost transparent in his thinness. 'No, sir. Didn't seem nobody cared much.'

Lieutenant Graham smiled. 'Well, we'll get it fixed. I wouldn't want you to strangle to death.'

'No sir.'

'Were you with the company at the Cascades?'

The other swallowed, and shifted his feet again. His bony, high-cheeked face didn't change expression. 'Yes-sir. I was with 'em.'

It seemed that Graham was going to say something more about it; then he simply said, 'I see,' and that was the end of it. He went over to the leather bag and untied the straps wound round it, removing a small duffel of canvas. He took out a metal marker and handed it to Boyd. 'Mark my bridle for me and have two or three mounts at the picket for me to look over. I'd like to pick a horse.'

'Today, Lieutenant? I know horses; it's one thing I do; and I can get you some good ones to see; but I mean, ain't you goin' to get settled first?'

'I would like to have one for reveille tomorrow.'

With wondering disbelief Boyd took the marker, looked at it and stuck it in his pocket. He saluted. 'Yessir, I'll have 'em ready. There's a nice grey the remount brought up the other day.'

'Light horses, Boyd. I like a light horse, with a good chest but lean in the withers and rump. They manœuvre better and can average a longer march.'

'Yessir. Tell Mrs Graham I'll fetch up water for her every day, leave it in the kitchen.'

'All right, Boyd. Thank you. I'll come down after a while,' Graham said.

He watched the thin T of bones that was Boyd going down towards the picket. He liked him.

He walked across to the bedroom doorway and watched Angela unpacking for a few minutes. 'It isn't Albany,' he said. 'But I think it's going to be comfortable.'

'If you're worrying about me,' she answered, stopping as she was unfolding a blanket, 'I think it's fine.'

'It's going to be hard here, the only woman in camp.

'There will be enough to do, getting the cabin settled, more furniture made. And Dalles is a short ride from here, Ed.'

'Dalles!' He laughed. 'It isn't much of a town.' Then he leaned down towards her, one hand on the edge of the bed, watching her. 'You aren't sorry you came out here? I know it isn't much. I guess it's primitive compared to what you had in the east, rugs on the floor and outside lamps and curtains and all.'

Affgela laid down the garment she was holding and smiled. 'We'll have all that out here in time. I like it. I'm with you and I like it.'

He saw the rolling, shiny mass of her dark hair where she had fluffed it out against the slender face and rounded shoulder, and he pulled her young body to him.

'Bringing you was the only time I think I ever went back on what I thought was right,' he said, and kissed her.

Afterwards he wandered back in the other room and took his sword belt from the table and hung it up on one of the whittled pegs beside the door. For a moment he looked around at the deerskin stretched on the wall opposite the picture, the single table and chair together, the handmade settee which was something like wicker and reminded him of the east and home. Then he sat down at the table, curiously rubbing his fingers along its surface. *He must have lived here, he thought. Probably sat here in the evenings at this table, as I am doing. And this was his company. His men.* It was difficult for him to believe, sitting there in the cabin, that it had happened and was over. It was like looking at a bed where they told you

someone had died and not being able to visualize anything.

And in the closeness and the remoteness of the cabin he experienced the feeling that came when they told him Trew was killed—the urgent need for revenge against these Yakimas he had never seen, and the resolve that brought him out here to this special place in far-off Oregon where Trew died. He thought of how he had felt at Leavenworth when he stood in the field grade's office and asked for assignment to Trew's regiment, his same company. And he remembered how the ranking officer had tried to discourage him.

'I understand your reasons for wanting to go out to his old company,' he had said. 'We know you were step-brothers. That's why I'm considering it. But the army's got no place for one-man vigilante committees running a private war against Indians.'

Lieutenant Graham had told him it wouldn't be on any personal-war basis. He had promised that it wasn't going to be. But the other had been sceptical.

'It'll be a damned tough job, Graham. Even for a line officer with experience. Taking over his company, all veteran Indian fighters, some with the First when it started in thirty-three. And that's only part. It's a full war out there with the Yakimas and Klicks, not just some renegades skirmishing us. It'll be hard and dirty and unrewarding and you'll wish to God you had taken some nice commissary berth your first tour.'

He had known then how it was going to be. Taking over line dragoons, Trew's men, and him only out of cadet braid a month. But his feelings, the need in him, overrode all else.

'We're short of officers and there's a god chance I can get you sent out there,' the field grade had told him. 'But

one thing . . . I don't know if you planned telling them about being related to Captain Canby. I'm afraid here the army's interests take precedence over our own feelings and I must insist you don't. Just use your own last name.'

In these few hours at Dalles he saw what the other meant, how it would be if the men knew he was related to the dead officer who commanded them before.

He heard Angela working in the bedroom, small noises against his consciousness, and he recalled thinking of her when the orders came—five days married, coming to this lonely post away from almost everything civilized she knew. But afterwards, telling her, she had seemed to expect it and the trunk she was unpacking now had already been brought down and opened for airing.

'Ed, you're the army in this family,' he remembered her saying. 'It's what you think you should do. That's all that matters.'

Graham rose from the table and looked out through the window of the cabin where the brown sacking was pulled back for the airless Oregon summer. The heat glistened outside. And there were the sounds of dragoon panoply, an itinerant jingling somewhere, a horse neighing deep in its chest, a man's shouted voice, and the small lieutenant in the new uniform had become part of it.

He went in to the doorway and called Angela.

'I'm going down to the picket for a while. I'll be back.'

He buckled the sword belt around him and picked up the high dragoon hat with the orange cockade. He saw Boyd waiting for him, holding the new animals, as he walked down from the cabin. As he rode off, Boyd stood watching him, shaking his head and muttering quietly to himself.

3

RALPH ADAMS did three things after Lieutenant Graham arrived. He posted the picket sentries, cleaned his sabre and put it on again, and shaved. The last was his own idea but he did not think the new officer would let him claim that if he waited more than the first day to start. His beard was not wholly erasable and the remaining dark traces along his jaws gave his face a leaner edge than ever.

The men in F company thought Graham would follow the regular custom of settling quarters. They did not expect to see him officially for one or two days, until his cabin was arranged; and no one believed Boyd when he told them the lieutenant had picked his horse and was going to take reveille the next day.

But he was waiting for them, taut and erect on the slimly connected grey he had chosen, a barely visible form in the early vagueness of the dawn. He sat high on the horse in the commander's place and watched as the tousled and sleepy men aligned themselves in formation. Some of them were unaware he was even there until they faced their animals around.

He took Adams's report briskly, and did not make the usual arrival talk of new officers. 'Dismiss your company, Sergeant.'

Like the others, Adams had anticipated something more and was a little slow. He saluted and went through the routine drill. 'Cumneee, daasssmisst!'

The dragoons broke formation and headed back to

picket their horses and Lieutenant Graham pulled up beside Adams, freshly trim in the growing light of morning, the hat visor squared on his face.

'Good morning, Sergeant,' he said. 'After mess have the non-commissioned officers rehearse reveille until we can carry it off better than this morning.'

Some of them had not been through a formal reveille since Canby let them take off their sabres, and Adams knew they had not done well but he felt the instinctive rebellion rising in him.

'They all know the reveille manual, Lieutenant. I'll get 'em bucked up. I'd like to straighten 'em out without makin' 'em practice somethin' they been doin' for years.'

'I appreciate how you feel; but it didn't look as if they knew it too well just now.'

'I guess not, Lieutenant.'

'I'd like it closer to the manual, not so ragged. And several of them forgot their cross-belts. I want them in full uniform at reveille and any other company formations.'

Adams's lips pressed on each other. 'Yessir. I'll tend to it.'

Lieutenant Graham cantered his grey towards the picket and Adams looked after him. *He's new as hell, he thought, and we're all going to be sure of it before long. We'll be here in camp working on garrison drill while them Yakimas'll be having a time.* He glanced down at his sabre. 'And you're back,' he said to himself.

But despite his own opinions Adams had an automatic response to orders that functioned independently of what he might be thinking himself.

He fell the men out after mess with no explanation; and they toiled and drilled on company formations until the legs of their blue pants were as wet as the horses. As

Graham watched almost unnoticed, Sergeant Adams's Indian-keen eyes sought the flaw and, seeing it, his head nodded. Do it again. It was the professional soldier in Adams, which he had never lost, and a scarred pride in his men on the riding field or anywhere else that made him demand more perfect execution than even Graham had wanted.

Later, when they were finished and tending their horses, Roan asked him, 'What's the matter with you, Adams? You gone crazy?'

'You want him to think we can't make army standards in this company?'

'No.' Then Roan thought. 'Graham's standards, you mean.'

'They're the same. He ain't askin' nothin' that ain't called for in books or manuals.'

'You ought to hear 'em talkin' already. You don't have to kill 'em, Adams.'

Adams paused, holding his saddle with his arm over his shoulder. 'Yes, you do. With him, you do.'

He stalked down towards his rack, a wishbone of damp sweat showing across the back of his uniform. Roan snapped his rein lines together and shook his head, then trailed after him.

The following days were the same. Lieutenant Graham made a schedule and put it on the orderly room wall and it governed their duty time. He began mounted and dismounted drill and short practice forage marches. And sabre drill, from basic draw to practice charges without sabres to charges with drawn sabres. First, four men abreast, then eight, then twelve. Firing from the prone. Firing from the crouch. Firing from the standing horse. The moving horse. He rode his grey around the training groups of men until they saw his white gloves on the

reins when he wasn't even on the riding field. He came down at stable call in the spotted gloves and felt fore-legs and looked in mouths and rubbed flanks; then ordered Adams to replace eighteen of the company horses.

There was an undeniable tightening of discipline in F Company, a peaking of performance; but under the correctness the dragoons were sullen and restive. They wanted to fight real Indians and he had them manoeuvre against imaginary ones; they wanted to ride against the Yakimas and the Klickitats and he gave them jawbone patrols that were already scouted and planned. They did not understand this new officer and his demands; it was the feeling a horse trained to the hackamore must have when he questions the hard bit in his mouth.

In the ordnance tent where they were cleaning weapons even the mild-voiced Roan who had ridden with Adams ten years complained. He sat with the sabre across his legs, toughly muscled in his lankiness and the blond hair long beneath the canted dragoon hat.

'I don't know why we're cleaning these here things,' he told Adams in his gently accented tones. 'The noise they make ridin', the lieutenant might as well hang bells on us. The cap'n never thought they were any good.'

'You're thinkin' too much for a non-commissioned officer of corp'rul grade.'

'You stickin' up for him against Canby?'

'I ain't stickin' up for nobody against nobody. The army sent him here from Vancouver or wherever he was to run this company. They didn't ask us for our vote on it.'

Trooper Hardish quit sighting through the carbine's barrel and looked at them. Since his eyes were good and he shot well, he rode scout most of the time. Being scout gave him a certain stature in the company. 'Gloves

Graham,' he said, reflecting on it. 'Clean your sabres. Wear 'em again. Walk your horse. Grass him off. Ride him again. What're we gettin' ready to do, fight them Yakimas or give 'em a ridin' exhibition?'

'There'll be enough to go round,' one of the privates said. 'A Nez Perce told me ol' Kamiakin's got hisself nigh on seven hundred braves between here and Walla Walla. The colonel's goin' to have a time, punishin' them with five companies of dragoons.'

'Aw, the lieutenant's got it figgered how to run 'em off. He's goin' to blind 'em with our shiny swords,' Hardish said.

'He sure ain't goin' to get near enough to fight 'em.'

They all looked at Hardish and the private and laughed. Adams listened, knowing he should turn it off. He thought how Graham had changed everything, which was all right because he was an officer and had the right; but he kept thinking of Graham himself, who had no more real fighting experience than riding hall drill and galloping around the Academy grounds.

'He shut off your tactics, Sarg. Since he's come we ain't killed one Injun.'

Adams turned on him but didn't say anything.

'And he brings his wife with him. Told Boyd they'd already started up-river when the Injun raids made everybody start leavin'.'

'Yeh,' the hulking private who was doing most of the talking said, 'I'd like to see mine again.'

'You ain't got no wife, Childers.'

'That's what I mean. Seein' that black-headed Graham lady around camp makes me think how nice it'd be.'

Sergeant Adams rose. 'That's enough. Nobody in this company makes jokes about a soldier's wife.'

The men in the tent looked along at him and some

smiled uneasily because it surprised them. They thought he had had enough Edward Shirley Graham, too.

• And Adams knew what their faces meant. But he was a regular, a professional long knife, and even in spirit this was outside his code.

Childers, the private he had reprimanded, stood up. 'Ladies got no call marchin' with the regiment.'

'You ain't been in the company long enough to talk out loud,' Adams said. 'Even if you're right.'

Childers moved towards Adams, and the beefy Hardish grabbed the private's arm; but he shook it off. Then both Roan and Hardish took him, holding his arms tightly to his sides.

'Lissen,' Hardish said.

'Let him come,' Adams told them, extremely polite.

'We need our men. Even privates,' Roan said. 'We got no time to be doctorin' him, Adams. But if he's sure he wants the fun with a sarjint, let him throw his sabre an' see if it's worthwhile.'

They all knew the ritual and, gathering from the sloping sides of the tent, crowded around Sergeant Adams. He took the sabre from its scabbard, a heavy blunt sword with hardly any balance. Then holding it backwards under the hilt guard in his wide span of hand, he moved back several paces from the thick tent pole and threw the sabre at it. It stuck in the hard, treated wood, oscillating back and forth from the handle's weight.

'Throw yours,' Hardish told the private. 'If it sticks, Adams'll take off his jacket and marks and give you some time. If it don't, they ain't no use botherin' him. You'll just get killed.'

The dragoons tightened in a closer circle, a savage expectancy in them. The whole Graham cycle had given them a feeling of tightness and frustration that was find-

ing a kind of release in this quarrel between Adams and Childers.

The heavy-shouldered private drew his sabre out of the leather scabbard he had been cleaning and moved back from the pole. Ralph Adams suddenly wanted to fight something and had already unbuttoned the neck of his jacket. The other threw his sabre the short distance, the muscled depth of his arm behind it. The sabre caromed off the pole and fell clattering on the ground. Everybody began laughing.

'Pick it up, boy,' Roan told him, turning away with the others.

But Childers, perhaps in a man's dignity or because he was new and did not believe this sabre ritual satisfied anything, didn't move to recover his sabre. He stood with his rounded balled shoulders held forward slightly, looking at Early.

'You got yourself a good way of not gettin' whipped, ain't you, Sarjint?'

'Been in the First since we started,' Hardish said. 'Com-p'ny sarjints cain't be fightin' ever' mouth that wants time. You got to earn a right to it. You didn't.'

'The soldier was talkin' to me,' Adams said with the same politeness as before.

The private picked up his sabre and moved it away from his feet. Both he and Adams pulled out of their jackets and belts and gave them to the men around them. Adams didn't want to fight this private over Graham's wife. In a way he was going against his own men. She had no business in the camp; they all knew it; Adams himself better than any of them.

But he showed nothing of what he was feeling as he watched Childers. The private moved fast for his bulk. His doubled fist splatted on Adams's forearm and then

Adams swung and there was a red blotch on Childers's forehead. Adams never wore the red undershirt or anything else under his jacket, and his big naked chest and shoulders was a glaring whiteness among the uniformed soldiers.

The private grabbed Adams's head, his spread fingers making red parallel furrows behind Adams's ear as he wrenched his head down and tried to bring up his own knee. Adams turned away and the blow grazed along his cheek, the rough orange cord on the other's trousers burning the skin. Childers set himself as Adams shook his head a little. But as the private hit him in the temple, Adams leaned into a straight arm that caught Childers across his front teeth and mouth. His face began bleeding.

It seemed almost slow motion as the two men fought carefully in the small area between the other dragoons, almost as if their soldiers' minds kept them from disarranging the orderliness of the arms tent. They were both large men and their blows were paced and measured and not seemingly hard except when you saw the damage each did.

Adams, his mouth bleeding, drove Childers against the tent. As Childers stumbled and fell on one knee, he hugged Adams's thigh and they fell wrestling in a tangle of arms and legs.

Boyd ducked into the tent and saw them rolling on the ground, choking and gouging, the men moving back for them. 'Graham's comin'!' he whispered hoarsely.

The dragoons jumped towards the two men and dragged them apart and Adams and Childers twisted against the men holding them.

'Damn it,' Adams said, the blood caking around the side of his mouth.

'Sarg, lissen, the lieutenant's cōmin'.'

Boyd kept talking to them but it was a few seconds before either Adams or the private understood. Somebody was pushing Adams's jacket at him and helping him drag it over his arms while another man was wiping Childers's face with a kerchief.

Boyd stood halfway out the tent opening watching for Lieutenant Graham. Adams rubbed his fingers over his mouth and looked across at Childers, who was buttoning his jacket and taking the sword belt Roaf held out to him. He had lost something with them in fighting Childers, Adams thought. He didn't know what it was exactly, but he had lost it, here in this tent, fighting one of his own men over an officer's wife. *Damn Graham*, he thought. *Damn all Grahams who bring their wives in the field and walk around with a manual in one hand and no brains.*

Lieutenant Graham pushed the tent flap back and Adams's command meshed with the movement of the entering, polished boot toe.

'Carry on,' Graham said as he came inside.

He stood for a moment, inordinately perfect in bearing, the buckle of his sword belt gleaming and precisely centred below the line of buttons on his jacket and his gloves folded neatly at the break of the wrist bands and held in his small hand.

Edward Shirley Graham, 'Gloves' Graham, did not look much like a dragoon. He resembled a jockey somewhat in his size except he was heavier and had a fair share of meat and sinew through his chest and shoulders, which you did not always notice the first time. He was brittle and military and the edge of his hat visor was a horizontal line that was exactly two finger widths above the end of his nose because he invariably checked it when

he dressed. His brown eyes were young and wide looking, masking the hardness behind them.

'The drills and mounted practice are cancelled tomorrow,' he told Adams.

'We movin' out, Lieutenant?'

'No. Colonel Woolwine and the regiment reached Wild Horse Creek and haven't sighted any sizeable force of Yakimas. Our orders are still to hold the landings.'

'Don't sound like Kamiakin, Lieutenant. Lettin' 'em get that far up-river, less he wants 'em to.'

'You may be right, Sergeant, but it doesn't change our orders. The regiment is running on small groups and single wagons of our people from farther up-river. They all say the Yakima's main war party is somewhere around Walla Walla. We'll stay here at Dalles until we get different instructions.'

Adams shifted in the darker shadows of the tent, away from the opening. 'You said we was cancellin' drills.'

'Yes,' Graham said. 'We're going to make a training march. The entire company. I'd like to have as many men as possible go, outside of the necessary guard and fatigue, and we'll take the pack train and wagon. Full equipment.'

Roan pushed ahead of some of the other men. 'We goin' Injun huntin', Lieutenant?'

'No.' Lieutenant Graham turned a little towards all of them. 'That's why I wanted to talk to most of you together. This will be no reconnaissance for Indians. It's a company problem, a training march. We'll follow a prescribed route out and back.'

The ones who had stopped momentarily in their work went back to it, their elation gone. Keep sitting around Dalles while he kept them practising at being first-class garrison soldiers, they thought. A couple of them looked

at each other, thinking how Calaby would have got some movement orders out of Old Crooked Leg. But not Graham, not this stiff-backed little second.

'We'll take our rolls and regular field equipment, normal ammunition,' the lieutenant said to Adams. 'I'll go over the route and details with you at the orderly room when you've finished up here.'

He ought to have known Graham wasn't letting up on playing garrison, Adams told himself. It was probably the only thing he was good at. 'Yessir, Lieutenant,' he said.

Graham returned his salute and glanced oddly at Adams's face a moment; and, as he turned to leave, he saw the sabre still sticking in the tent post. He looked at it, touched the handle, and then was gone.

For a while none of them talked. Then Hardish slammed the percussion lock of his carbine. 'Dry firin', he told them. 'That's all we're goin' to do with him. Just dry firin'. A trainin' march. What the hell's he think we are, recruits?'

'Maybe he don't want to meet no Injuns.'

'I should of took the transfer to A. They're up there with the colonel where there's somethin' goin' on,' another said.

Adams felt a pent-up pressure at not being able to change anything. He pulled the sabre from the post and slid it back in the scabbard. Childers was standing watching him, his eyes mooned and staring beneath the fatty brows that went over and covered the upper lids, the depthless flatness of eyes cut in a pumpkin.

'The Lieutenant ain't always goin' to be around,' he said.

Roan looked at both of them. 'Leave it off. Leave it off; it's over. You know him. If he'd caught you you'd both

be up on a court. Ain't no loye for you, Childers, we stopped it.'

'One day, Adams, you and me,' the private said, ignoring Roan.

'You tell me when,' Adams answered, forced into something he had no real heart in, fighting because Graham had no judgment.

Childers gathered up his sabre and carbine and other things and walked past him, carrying them across his arms. He thrust sideways through the tent opening and disappeared.

Roan moved beside Adams, waiting. 'You can't true blame him, Adams. You know it ain't no good havin' her 'round camp. Young like she is. A lot of 'em been lookin' and thinkin', seein' her everyday, the only woman.'

'I ain't blamin' him.'

'You're pushin' 'em away from you, Adams. Your men, and you're pushin' 'em all away from you. You think he'd appreciate what you did? Give you a court, like I said.'

Adams didn't answer as he stood with his hand still absently holding on to the sabre handle. 'You watch Childers,' Roan said. 'He ain't through with it.'

No, Adams thought. He wasn't. And he couldn't blame him. And that's what made it so bad.

Roan took up his own gear and left and Adams looked round at the men still working in the tent, marks of service on them all; and he imagined the gentle, high-conversationed party at Graham's wedding or maybe his graduation. He hadn't sorted the two worlds out yet, Adams thought. He figured you could whip Indians with map exercises and company problems and tradition. Not like Captain Canby. The best are dead early. It was a sunless feeling, making him cold when he wasn't cold.

'Come on, hurry up,' he told them brusquely. 'We got inspection at reveille.'

'Inspections,' Hardish muttered. 'He lives on 'em. Next we'll be wearin' gloves on compost detail.'

'You bellyache too much,' Adams said, grinning.

Unconsciously he sided with them. They were a demanding kind; their scars and memories made them. But they rode with their bits clean and not green in the horse's mouth and got along three days on a canteen and a handful of corn and beans and little else. They didn't need a commissioned manual to teach them how to be U.S. dragoons. You joined them with more than quotes from military books and a clean uniform or you didn't get accepted.

Sergeant Adams picked up his hat and went outside and walked up towards the orderly room.

The early morning was still cool as the company saddled and lined up in two columns across the riding field. A good wind rushed down from the Cascades that were light browns with mangy patches of dark pines below the shades of blue, and above their great horizon of endless mountain fence loomed the snow mass of Mount Adams, which gave a cold feel to the wind blowing across the river. The riders and animals felt it; and even the pack horses with their loads bucked and pranced ahead of the supply wagon—like the dragoons, eager to move.

Beside Sergeant Adams, Graham waved to Angela standing outside the cabin and raised his arm in signal to the company. They rode out of the camp and Graham looked back at his wife and then at the men behind him, seeing an even alignment and precision in the horse columns as they strung out along the road. Adams also saw it and reluctantly a part of him felt a satisfaction, too, as the dragoons headed east out of the Dalles settlement.

Riding beside the lieutenant he told himself, sure, he's got them looking like a ceremonial company. He'd give

that to Graham. They were turned out better; the wood on the pack saddles was polished and the butts of their Sharps were polished; they wore sabres again and covered down in file almost as good as marching infantry. But when were they going to get back to fighting? There was more to whipping Indians than polishing brass.

Graham sent out the front scouts when they were nearly a mile away from the Dalles. Occasionally he looked at the map which he had marked with arrows and notations. It was the one he had gone over with Sergeant Adams and had stayed up after tattoo two long nights changing the symbols and plotting the routes with march graphs and terrain scales. The march was regulated and ordered, their movements almost in sequence with the sentences from the handbook on march instructions; Adams noticed the company reached the tick points at the exact times Graham had written on the map.

It was boring and tedious to all of them, the monotony of the detail of the riding field drill transferred to a mounted road march.

'Here we go,' one said as the staff began rising at the head of the column. 'Trot your horse. Walk 'im awhile. Company, dismount and rest. Unload the packs, load the packs.'

After nearly eight miles of riding they reached a meandering trail that left the road and narrowed south towards the finger ridges of the Blue Mountains. It was all uneventful. The only ones with any freedom were the two scouts riding out ahead.

They had stopped for rest and watering near Des Chutes, loosening the girths on the pack animals and their own mounts, when they first saw the Indian. Lieutenant Graham and Sergeant Adams were squatted together a short distance ahead of the rest of them, looking

at the map, and the soft plopping of the walking pony made them look up.

The mottled pony came towards them, long run out and wet, too tired any more to be frightened by the scare sticks tied behind him and hitting his back legs. The Indian on him could hardly be seen at first, spread-eagled over the pony's back, his hands roped together under the animal's neck and his feet lashed around its belly. The scouts had passed it for a lone, riderless horse.

Adams and Graham stood up and walked towards the pony. 'Damn savages,' Adams said, cutting the sticks loose from the horse in a quick sweep of his knife. He sheathed it and looked at the Indian, who was still alive. 'It's a Nez Perce. Friendly to us. He's a piece from home, Lieutenant. Mostly them thievin' Cayuses through here.'

'Cut him loose,' Graham told one of the dragoons, and two or three gathered around the Indian and lifted him off the pony. As they laid him on the ground they saw he wasn't painted and there were no war signs on the horse. He was completely naked except for the azian stroud over his loins and the tribal band and feather.

His chest was lacerated and bleeding where the small salmon hooks had been thrust in his skin; there were other wounds on his stomach and legs. And as his hands dragged on their backs when a dragoon raised him to the canteen, Adams saw clotting stumps where the fore-fingers were amputated just below the second joint.

'Yakimas,' Adams said. 'Some of 'em got civilized and don't scalp no more; rather take the fingers back to show.'

The Indian lay looking up at them, water running down around his mouth and dripping off his chin. 'Owhi.'

'What does he say?' the lieutenant asked.

'Owahi,' Adams answered. 'Injuns call him Owahi.' He kneeled beside the Nez Perce. 'Car? Where?'

'Mittite yawa.' He flexed his arm and tried to gesture.

'Over there? Back that way?' Adams asked, pointing towards the strings of pines along the way the pony had come. The Indian nodded and Adams told Graham, 'Owahi's Kamiakin's brother-in-law. He ain't the war chief but he runs a picked party of braves, some of the Yakima elect. No tellin' how far this Injun's come since he ran on 'em. But they're on this side of the river.'

'Find out how big the party was.'

'Hiyou siwash! A great many Indians?'

The warrior moved his face slowly back and forth once, pulling up as one of the dragoons worked on his hands.

'Better put him in the wagon and I'll see what I can do for him,' Graham said.

Three soldiers picked up the Nez Perce and carried him to the wagon that was standing where the team was watering. Sergeant Adams stuck his fingers in his belt, his legs spread a little. 'They're all over the Territory since they got the settlers runnin'.'

Graham's reply was not related to what Adams said and it was one of the few times he had seen the lieutenant show anything resembling emotion.

'You would think they would have the decency to kill him.'

Adams saw an opening. 'Lieutenant, let's see if we can scare 'em up.'

'No.'

'We goin' on with the march back to camp?'

It was what Graham had been training them against, bolting after the first Indian they saw, letting feeling control them instead of training. And he wasn't satisfied they were ready for any skirmish with the Yakimas. It

had to be decisive and sure when it came. But Graham thought of Trew and it was hard to answer Adams.

'Yes, we'll continue the march. Get them mounted up, Sergeant. I'll take a look at the Indian while they're assembling.'

When F Company columned along the dirt trail again Graham motioned them forward and the dragoons moved off. Adams, tall and brooding beside him, remembered the soldier who had said maybe Graham didn't want to meet any Indians. What if all this straight army stuff covered up something else. The doubt seeded in Adams's mind. Here the company was, he thought, extra ammunition and stores, field loads, all good horses with the new ones from remount, but Graham wasn't going to look for the Yakimas. He wasn't going to fight.

Almost an hour afterwards they pulled up to bury the Nez Perce. Adams shot the pony and put it near the marking stones for identity to any of the tribe coming through. While they were stopped the two scouts rode back and reported seeing the Yakima party ahead. And even as they were talking to Lieutenant Graham, a few of the Yakimas appeared on a treeless hill some distance away. Scout had seen scout.

Graham watched them for a few minutes, then signalled to continue the march. All of them swung out in column behind him now, a relish across their faces and in their riding, their hands moving down to loosen the hand guns and unsnap the lids on the cartridge boxes. The route they were following would pass them parallel to the Yakimas on the hill. They even forgave the endless practice charges back at the Dalles camp. They would be charging something this time.

When the company was about seven hundred yards from where the front line of Yakimas sat their ponies on

the hill, now masked some by the forward low foliage, Adams glanced up at them and rode nearer Lieutenant Graham.

'What do you figger, Lieutenant? Charge 'em off the hill and get 'em in the flat ground behind it?'

'I figure to continue our march, Sergeant.'

The Indians could be heard yelling now, taunting the dragoons, some circling their ponies out and back and shaking their lances. Beyond shooting range of the soldiers' Sharps or their own few Hudson Bays, the Yakimas demonstrated on the hill with their screaming and lance-shaking. Graham watched them and kept walking his grey.

'You ain't goin' up after 'em?' Adams asked.

'No.'

There was a strange tightness to Lieutenant Graham's face. His own discipline was in this, too, because it was not pleasant to look at the Yakimas on the hill and continue the march. But he kept on.

'We're not going to attack them,' he said. 'We're going to do exactly what we planned and complete this company march back to Dalles.'

'Lieutenant,' Adams said, 'we both know them few up there ain't all that's in the party. There's more of 'em down back of the hill where we can't see 'em. Let 'em be there. Can't be more than eighty or probably ninety, all told, and we got nearly forty.'

'We're going to stick to the purpose of this training instruction,' Graham replied. 'This company is not engaging in any Indian skirmish.'

'I ain't never argued with an officer,' Adams said, 'but these Injuns ain't never seen us ride away from 'em. The way they think it means our chief is scared to fight. Listen to 'em, Lieutenant. You know Yakima?'

'Enough to understand.' Graham seemed almost unnaturally straight on the horse. 'It takes more to hold our column,' he said, and looked towards the hill. 'I wonder if we have that much.'

Across the intervening distance between the moving army riders and the hill, behind its screening mass, some two or three hundred yards down-slope in the shading, interlacing pines, Owahi and another seventy braves waited on their ponies. The warriors he had sent to the crest screamed and taunted. The Yakimas threatened and insulted the dragoons; but the war party was not going to leave the hill and attack the company on the trail across from them.

They were not afraid of dying, no more than the white soldiers. But in this war with the pony soldiers they called Bostons, many warriors of their tribe had floated free from the burial houses with the Columbia's rise and gone down in its swift funeral current to the waiting Pacific. They knew the medicine of the iron waist gun of six voices and the fire stick these pony soldiers carried.

And so Owahi and his braves would seek other ways of bringing these whites to the arrow-and-hand-length range before making a riding assault on their tight formations. They had learned how they must fight the long knives and it would be on their terms, where they could use the bow and the lance, the weapons they knew best. Or with their small party they would only harry and insult and wait for another time.

The head of F Company was already passing where the Yakimas were and even then Adams could not believe the small officer beside him was a coward. Damn him, he thought. He glanced back at the Indians helplessly.

Corporal Roan turned out of the riding files impatiently

and rounded the staff guide on bearer until he was behind the lieutenant and Adams.

'Sam says there's a small ridge goin' off the trail up a ways. Leads right along behind the hill they're on. We goin' to use it?' he asked. 'What the orders?'

'Ain't no new orders,' Adams answered. When Roan kept riding and waiting uncertainly behind him, he swung around and barked. 'Get back in column! Your place ain't up here.'

Roan tried to grin, then began holding his horse in a little and letting himself drift back until he finally wheeled and rode back along the column.

The others strained towards him as he fell in his place again.

'What's he say, Corp'ul?'

'Notnin'. Adams's ridin' up there meaner 'n hell and he didn't give me no new orders.'

'We'll be past the place Sam saw in a minute. What's he waitin' for? Whyn't he close us up and get ready?'

Roan stared over at the other rider, the anger transferring itself among them and in him now. 'You ask Adams.'

The dragoon turned to the one behind him. 'Well, I ain't passin' up no chance like this. Some of them bucks were at the Cascades probably. If the lieutenant is too scairt to take us up there we'll go without him.'

'Yeh,' the second soldier said. 'I'm with you on it.'

'Shut up that talk,' Roan told them.

But it was too late. They had already wheeled their horses around together and were springing over the low bushes along the trail and galloping up towards the Yakimas.

'Come back, you damned fools!' Roan shouted.

At the front of the company's column Graham saw

them charging up the slope where the bunch grass was burned, weaving in and out among the scrub wormwood and rocks. 'On whose orders are those men attacking?'

Sergeant Adams felt almost guilty because he was glad they had broken out of the column; things would get going now. 'I don't know,' he said.

'Bugler, sound a recall to those men,' Graham ordered.

The bugler drew up and blew quickly; but the two dragoons kept riding up the rounding face of the hill. The Yakimas began firing on them; and along the company lines the other soldiers lost the riding pace and were shifting and turning on their animals, unslinging their carbines, making ready to follow. The excitement was running in Adams, too, and he had to fight himself to keep from grinning.

'Guess we got to send part of the company after 'em, Lieutenant. I'll take the file behind me and bring 'em back.'

He had already turned and was starting to signal the other men when Graham's voice stopped him.

'No. Tell them to straighten out this column.' He looked towards the bugler. 'Sound another recall.'

A few of the men began shouting and waiting for Adams and the lieutenant, the column a series of moving horses. But Sergeant Adams was unaware of it; he sat his gelding unable to believe Graham, not hearing the men yelling, not hearing the Yakimas, simply sitting there and looking at the officer with a complete and utter disbelief that he would not send anyone after them.

'All right, they disobeyed, broke orders. Punish 'em for it, Lieutenant. Don't do it by lettin' 'em get killed.'

The two dragoons had reached a triangular patch of darker brush nearly halfway up the hill. There were puff

smokes from the Yakimas' Hudson rifles but the two riders kept going, zigzagging their horses back and forth.

'They broke column when specifically ordered not to. They ignored two commands to return to their company. This entire company is not going to bolt and go riding after them and get more men killed,' Graham said. 'I am serious when I say I will shoot anyone who leaves the column without orders to follow them.'

He saw the strain in Adams's eyes and face and it was his own, mirrored for him—the demand of staying here in ordered column reflected back at him. The first test of his own disciplined belief. The two men, the sergeant and the officer, faced each other from their horses, Adams's big hands clenched and white, bloodless places on either side of his mouth.

'They're cuttin' back!' one of the dragoons yelled.

The sudden shout forestalled whatever might have happened between the two men. They both looked quickly towards the higher reaches of the hill where the dragoons were turning their horses and riding parallel to the Yakimas above them. They saw the two men firing their Sharps, then galloping off in the volleyed arrows and musket shots from the Indians; alone, the rest of the company still moving in column along the trail behind them, the two were not foolish enough to risk trying to carry the hill crest by themselves.

But as they slanted away from the few warriors who were dismounted and shooting from the rocks and bush clumps, another fifteen or twenty Yakimas broke over the humping line of the hill and rode in a spreading wave to encircle the two soldiers. These were horsemen, these Yakimas, and their wild, horse-racing sport in which they would bet their families showed now in the way they

came on the ponies—a naked, cinnamon-coloured part of their animals, their bows and a handful of arrows aloft, or the lance held against their underwrists and laid across their shoulders. They rode down-slope at an almost impossible speed.

Lieutenant Graham reared his grey in a quick turn and rode back along the column towards where the two dragoons would reach the company's line of march.

'Cover them from your positions in the column when they're close enough,' he said.

The men saw the lieutenant jogging along their lines on his grey, very erect and expressionless, almost the band carriage of the riding ring in his posture. There was no real relief in the men as they saw the other two dragoons riding in escape. They had seen this officer, their commander who worshipped perfection of conduct, willing to sacrifice two of his men to the Need of Perfect Discipline. And as they readied their carbines, unslinging them and holding the barrels angled up as he passed, there were some who thought long.

It looked as if the two who had charged up the hill without orders might escape; even the speed of the Yakimas' mountain ponies was not enough both to circle out the extra distance and outrun the heavier army horses. But as the first shots from the company's column forced some of the Indians to swerve off, one Yakima pulled up and shot his Hudson Bay musket before galloping after the others. Its charge struck the leading dragoon and he slumped on his horse's neck and continued down towards the trail. Behind the second soldier another brave thumbed off three arrows at good distance and one caught the dragoon in the upper arm; he floundered a moment on his horse and switched hands on the reins and kept after the other. Their horses broke down through a waist-

high copse of scattered bushes and clattered on the hard dirt and rocks of the trail.

They reached the last men in the column, the one with the arrow holding his arm and the other lying over half-conscious on his horse. Two or three of them helped pull the dragoon down from his horse while the second man dismounted himself, still holding his arm.

Lieutenant Graham rode up with Adams and dismounted, kneeling beside the soldier who had been hit by the musket ball. They had laid him on the grassy apron beside the trail. One of the other dragoons helped Graham and they cut his jacket loose; someone had brought the whisky and handed it to the lieutenant.

'It's lodged pretty deep,' Lieutenant Graham said. 'There isn't much I can do until we get back to camp. It'll take a doctor to get it out.'

The other soldier beside him unfolded the bandage cloths and wrapped them around the man's back, then pulled the short blue jacket up and buttoned the neck to hold it.

'Put him in the wagon,' Graham told them, and rose.

Sergeant Adams was standing behind him and he looked at the other dragoon who had broken from the column. He took the man's arm and twisted the shaft, working the arrow blade out carefully where it had gone into the full part of the arm.

'Can you get it out?' Graham asked.

'Yessir,' Adams said, angered at the soldier who caused it and at Graham for letting it happen.

The arrow point had furrowed the flesh and one of the barbed shoulders was sticking out, making it easier to work it loose from the wound. But Adams knew a Yakima shaft and he did it slowly, making sure he did not separate it from the short blade. When it was out, he

jerked it from the arrowshaft easily and handed it to the soldier as the medical orderly with Graham started bandaging his arm.

'Keep it,' he said, 'so's you remember you ain't a one-man army.'

The dragoon looked at Adams but he wasn't smiling. The other shifted his eyes awkwardly, watching the man's hands bandaging him.

Lieutenant Graham motioned to Corporal Roan. 'Are these your men?'

'Yessir, Lieutenant.'

'Put them under arrest until we reach camp.'

Adams glanced at Graham and didn't say anything.

'Have someone lead their horses in and carry their carbines and gear,' Graham told Sergeant Adams.

'I can ride, Lieutenant,' the one dragoon said.

Graham's brown eyes flickered over him, then set themselves. 'All right.' He swung up on his horse and told Adams, 'Have Corporal Roan take charge of his prisoners and re-form the column. I want to know if the other man gets any worse.'

Adams saluted and both he and Roan watched the lieutenant ride back towards the head of the company.

'Adams, we can't take much more of him.'

'They disobeyed; ain't nothin' I can do about that. Gettin' themselves shot up don't change it.' He paused on his gelding. 'I'll talk to him about 'em. I ain't promisin' nothin', but I'll talk to him.'

Adams legged his blue-clothed height up over the gelding and flipped the reins on its neck and cantered slowly after Graham. He had tried to see something in the lieutenant that would show he knew what the men were feeling; but he had seen nothing. Edward Shirley Graham, Second Lieutenant, Commanding, was still the two-legged,

walking manual that thought in printed pages, circumscribed of sensation.

Owahi's braves recognized the pony soldiers were not going to be drawn into attacking and they increased their yelling and insults. They made rapid dashes along the open side of the hill, putting on a show of horsemanship as they rolled under their ponies' bellies; some now and then getting off an arrow under their animals' necks or between the whirling fore and hind legs.

The Yakima braves, who delighted in the wealth of horses, often owned fifteen to twenty ponies apiece and there was tribal naturalness to their tactics now. They carried on beyond firing range in superb movement and riding beauty, designed to tempt and belittle the passing whites.

Adams and the men rode in sullen anger. They waited for Graham's signal, and when it did not come they cursed the regulations that bound them to him. Once, when Sergeant Adams rode back along the column in narrow-eyed silence, they thought it was the order they wanted. But he only stopped by the pack train leader and moved the train of five animals and the wagon up nearer the centre of the column as Graham had instructed him.

After he dropped out two more flank scouts, making four in all, he told the six trailing horsemen, 'Fall back a ways in rear guard. Don't engage. Close bac' in column if they come behind us.'

'What happens if this goes off by accident?' one of the dragoons taunted, tapping the snout of his carbine.

Adams's eyes bored into him from under the leather visor. 'Don't let it. Just protect the rear of the column. Them's your orders.'

Owahi's party did not make a deliberate attack on the dragoons. They kept harassing the scouts and feinting

towards the column the next five or six miles, but never close enough for effective fire. They disappeared for a time and then the scouts raised them again, far ahead on the opposite flank, still seeking an opening or contenting themselves with taunting and humiliating the long knives.

About four miles out of Dalles the Yakimas left them. Adams was riding abreast of the lieutenant when Hardish reported it, and he saw Graham only nod. The young officer's face seemed to relax afterwards and Adams interpreted it as relief in his skill at successfully running away from any fighting.

As they climbed the steep road to Dalles, the dust cottoning around the tired horses whose heads were pulled down in the ascent, Lieutenant Graham wondered how he could tell this sergeant, who knew Indians as well as they knew themselves, that it could have been a fine ambush, or the Cascades all over again. He held no illusions about the popularity of what he had done. But it had been right to hold the march column, he thought. You couldn't measure discipline in metred quantities. It was absolute. It existed or it didn't. And he had told them this march was a specific phase of training. If after everything else, all he believed, he started making reckless changes, wouldn't it come easier each time to forget any standards or control, for him, for all of them?

But Trew would have engaged, he thought. And that was what they could never forgive.

'You give 'em a court, Lieutenant, and we're goin' to be short two men,' Adams said abruptly, not having spoken to the lieutenant since it happened.

Yes, Graham thought. The attrition of regulation doing exactly what he had wanted to prevent, losing men with nothing decisive against the Yakimas. 'It was pure disobedience, Sergeant.'

'Yessir. I ain't arguin' it, Lieutenant. Only we need them two. No tellin' how long before Vancouver sends up some more replacements.'

'We'll have to get along.'

'We could give 'em somethin' on company book,' Adams said. 'They'd be gettin' punished and we wouldn't be losin' 'em on top of the time it'll take for 'em to get well.'

'We'll see,' Graham answered. 'But they must understand no one can go riding off when it happens to suit him, regardless whether he kills a few Indians or gets hurt himself doing it. This is F Company's policy and it will be as long as I am commanding it.'

'Yessir,' Adams said, and dropped it. He turned and brought the company to order as they began approaching the camp. He was convinced Graham would go through with a court. But when they rode in and halted, facing around on Graham's order and the lieutenant turned the company over to him and went off with the wagon and the wounded men, Adams's long face showed nothing of what he felt. He dismissed them and moved on his horse through the other dragoons as they began breaking formation and dismounting to unsaddle. He heard them talking, a tense anger in their conversation, but he did not enter it and only kept quietly loosening the girths around his gelding.

When some of them had thrown the stirrups up and were carrying their saddles in from the picket, he moved along with them, a detached, tall man who seemed impassibly unaware of the soldiers around him, even those who shouted and tried to talk to him. Whatever Sergeant Adams thought of Graham, he kept to himself. But he knew the company was thirty-eight men and one officer and not thirty-nine men, and that worried him most.

4

THE REGULAR SURGEON of the regiment had accompanied the five dragoon companies that were making the punitive march against the Yakimas and the Klickitats near Walla Walla. Boyd was sent after the civilian practitioner in the settlement, who was the only doctor in the area since the missionary doctor at Celilo was killed in the Indian raid on the mission there. The physician came back with the orderly and spent two hours with the soldier the Yakimas had shot. The musket wound was deep at the short range he took it and the dragoon had lost the ability to move his legs.

The doctor had put on his coat again and was standing outside the blockhouse with Graham when the lieutenant sent for Sergeant Adams.

'Doctor Cornish thinks we should evacuate him to Vancouver where there is a surgeon,' Graham told him as he came up to them. 'They have better facilities.'

'He's hurt bad, Lieutenant?'

'Yes, he is, Sergeant. His legs are paralysed.'

'The ball seems wedged against his spine,' the doctor told Adams. He looked around at both of them. 'It's beyond my skill, the instruments I have. I'm sorry.'

'We'll try to move him down in the morning,' Graham said. He shook hands with Doctor Cornish and waited while he climbed up into the buggy. 'Thank you for coming out.'

'That's all right, Lieutenant. I'm sorry I can't do more

for him. Let me know how he gets on, will you?' He looked apologetic as he said it.

Graham nodded as the other slapped the reins over the horse and the buggy pulled off. Lieutenant Graham stood watching, his face tight and worried in the dim beginnings of dusk. Then he turned to Adams.

'Make arrangements for the medical orderly to go down with him in the morning. Doctor Cornish said the steamer was taking a load of settlers down-river tomorrow. Make passage for the two men on her.'

'Yessir. You still goin' to have another march tomorrow?'

'Yes. You stay in camp and take care of this. You can also meet the remount agent and pick up the new horses.'

Sergeant Adams paused, looking at the lieutenant. 'You want me to make up the charge sheet on him and send it down with him?'

Graham gazed off across the darkening riding field. 'No,' he said.

'What about the other man?'

'Put him on company book when his arm is healed.' Lieutenant Graham's head turned back towards Adams, and the sergeant saw his posture stiffen. 'I'm not changing my mind or this company's policy,' he said. 'This man may never come back to duty. I can't see any fairness in giving one of them a court-martial and letting the other one off.'

'Yessir,' Adams replied. *Sure, change it now, he was thinking. Only it's late to be seeing you were wrong. The thing's done with.* Adams felt everything tightening inside him again.

'I'll see you in the morning, Sergeant. Good night.'

He saluted and didn't answer as Graham walked past him towards the cabin, his small figure dwindling into the dark. Once, when Graham was watching the buggy driv-

ing off, he had almost felt sorry for the lieutenant, as near as Ralph Adams could feel anything like that. And the company punishment was what he tried to get for the two men. But the company would not be in a mood to thank him or Graham. The talk about the company march was strong around the tents and the mess and this one gesture was not going to erase what happened.

But if this worried Lieutenant Graham, Adams did not see it in him when he came down to the orderly room after reveille wearing his equipment for the next march. Entering, there was his brisk sureness of what he was doing, and whatever Adams had seen momentarily outside the blockhouse was not visible now.

'Roan's formin' 'em up,' Sergeant Adams told him. 'Everythin's set for the two of 'em to go down-river on the *Wasco*. The doc's comin' out with his buggy; it'll ride easier than a wagon.'

'All right. They might try to make a hanging pallet for him if the bed of the buggy is high enough,' Graham said. He handed Adams the papers he was carrying. 'Here are the orders on the remounts.'

Sergeant Adams glanced at them and said, 'If you want that black turned back today, Childers won't be able to go. It belongs to him. That'll make five men, counting Boyd and the two guards stayin' in camp.'

'I don't know when the agent will get up here again. Vancouver says they can't spare a patrol to protect him. They lose men for too many days.' Lieutenant Graham settled his sabre on him and put on his gloves. 'I think you had better take them all in when he arrives.'

'Yessir. I'll meet him when he comes.'

'You know our route,' Sergeant, 'if something comes up. You can send Boyd or Childers.'

Adams went to the door with him and saw him walk

back to the cabin where his wife was waiting. They stood talking together. Seeing her always reminded him of Graham's dumbness in bringing her. Adams scowled and went back in the orderly room.

At their cabin Graham told Angela, 'We'll be gone six or seven hours, I expect. Sergeant Adams will be in camp and he will know where we are.'

She had noticed the small change in Boyd, who was inside filling the woodbox, and knew somehow it was connected with the march they had made yesterday, more than the two men being wounded. But there was nothing she could tell Ed. She looked over at the company of men forming at the other end of the field, the drying dust ballooning around them and their horses, and back at her husband.

'Ed, be careful.' It was inadequate and not what she meant.

He took her hand and squeezed it in his own. 'There won't be anyone hurt this time.'

She regarded him, the morning's brightness going over her head and face, her womanhood moulding the soft material of the summer dress; and he kissed her on the mouth. 'Don't worry about it,' he said, his arms crooked loosely around her waist. 'It had to happen. There are things you never enjoy doing, Angela, and if they hate me for it, I'm sorry. But I can't compromise with myself just to be liked.'

'Couldn't you try to explain to them, whatever it was? Maybe if they knew why, it would help.'

'You can't run a company that way. Orders that always have to be explained aren't very good orders.'

'Oh, I don't know what I mean,' she said. 'Probably you're right and it would be the same with any new officer but I see everything as your wife. Differently, I guess.'

'I love you,' he said suddenly, his arms closing around her, 'and I can see how it must seem to you. It'll work out.' He smiled again with the boyishness that came strangely and waved and took his horse and rode towards the waiting company. She watched them ride out of camp and then entered the cabin, glancing out through the window at the last riders. *If only the unfriendliness could change*, she thought. *If only they acted as if they wanted him here.*

After the company left camp, the doctor arrived from the settlement and Sergeant Adams helped him and the medical orderly load the wounded dragoon in the buggy. When they had gone, he returned to the orderly room and was checking the remount papers as Childers came in. Since their fight in the ordnance tent that had been stopped by Graham's arrival, there was a brooding in him that Adams saw now.

He clumped in with his jacket off and took down his hat, wiped his hand over his hair, and stuck the hat on with it tilted to one side. His stomach pushed out, he slouched with hands resting on his hips. He had taken to baiting with small acts that were never quite enough for insubordination.

'I'm goin' down to fix them poles on the picket. Is there some other orders you got after it's done?'

Sergeant Adams straightened from his work and leaned back, moving a long, heavy leg around the edge of the table and putting it out straight on his boot heel. Childers's hat was deliberate, and so was the missing jacket.

'Take it off in the orderly room,' Adams said.

'Lieutenant ain't here.'

'Don't matter. You don't wear your hat in the orderly room. And put your jacket on. You know the orders, Childers.'

'It's hot workin'. I'm on detail.'

'You wear your shirt.'

'How about my forage shirt? That's regulation.'

'One of 'em. Don't be goin' round like that.' Adams was getting tired of the game.

Childers removed his hat with measured slowness, studied it, fingering the device of arched sabres with their edges turned up that was on the front.

'We're gettin' a lot to settle, Sarjint. You and me.'

Adams felt a sigh inside him. 'I got some remounts to pick up and after I ain't got nothin' to do. We might as well make it today.'

'I told you I'd tell you, Sarjint.'

'I ain't got no more patience. I got other things to do besides babyin' you. We ain't doin' this company no good, Childers, with this needin' to be settled,' Adams told him. 'Let's get it done.'

'No. I ain't carin' about just fightin' you. Adams; it's more with you and me now.' He dropped the assumed slouch and let his arms hang at his sides, thickly muscled above and below the elbows, going up to the enormous pads of his shoulders. 'You ran me down pretty good in front of all of 'em, me with eleven years, and got off with it. So when I tell you it's time, you do everythin' you can, because I'm goin' to be tryin' to kill you, Adams.'

'Don't speech too long,' Adams said quietly.

Childers stopped at the doorway, his hand holding to the frame. 'You ain't goin' to use no book on me. I know you. You had a chance a hundert times already. You and me's different than Gloves. And you ain't goin' to start it because you're a sarjint and I been one and know what them marks mean,' Childers said. 'That's why I can pick my time. That's why you got to wait.'

He was right and they both knew it. He looked back

at Adams sitting behind the table and not getting up. Then he stepped out of the orderly room into the warm morning and headed across to the horse picket.

Boyd was returning from carrying wood to the lieutenant's cabin and he fell in beside the other private as they walked along the ground where the grass was worn off and furrowed by the horses.

'How come you're in camp?' he asked Childers.

The older soldier glanced at the orderly, whose skinny face was raw, young-looking. 'Go nowhere on foot. Gloves figgers on havin' Adams change my horse for a remount today.'

'Ain't no wonder,' Boyd said, grinning, 'way you ride him.'

'You're real tender. That Graham's rubbin' off on you with his worry about the damn horses.' Childers was still feeling charged from having been with Adams. 'Guess livin' around him is makin' you like him.'

'Aw, I ain't like him. But I see a lot of things the rest of you don't.'

'Like her, huh?'

Embarrassed, the young dragoon squinted and walked loose-jointedly with his head down, his thin shoulders rocking back and forth. 'She's a nice lady.'

'All ladies is.'

'And he ain't so bad when you know him more, like I do. He's just green, like me.'

'Bet you wouldn't trade jobs with nobody.'

Boyd glanced at him, his lips drawn and stiff. 'You got wrong ideas about her. I said she was a nice lady.'

Childers laughed at the kid. 'You'll make a dragoon,' he said, hitting him on his arm muscle. 'Standin' up to somebody as bigger than you as me. But you ain't got no experience yet. I was with the Second Dragoons in Flor-

ids, round them Seminoles, and some other places. I saw me some things. They're all alike, under them petticoats or azeeans, whatever the Injuns call 'em.'

'She ain't like womenfolk you know.'

'Calm down. But you got nice duty—a dollar a month extra and ridin' when you want.' Childers slowed and looked at him. 'Whyn't you go on the march this time?'

'I got a lot of things the lieutenant wants me to do,' Boyd answered seriously, relieved they had changed to something else. 'And I got to find some whale oil for the lamps up at the cabin.'

They reached the picket, and Childers started moving the three horses fastened there down to the other end of the rail. Boyd took one and led it around, helping him.

'The things the lieutenant give me will take most the day,' he said. 'There's the water to take up yet. I hate missin' doin' 'em all and I hate tellin' her I can't get the oil today. There ain't none in camp and I got to look in the settlement.'

Private Childers raised his head from examining one of the upright poles, wiggling it in the ground. 'Soon's I get this fixed I ain't got nothin' else to do unless Adams thinks up somethin'. Maybe I could help you some with your chores.'

Boyd finished tying the horse and walked back along the rail towards him. Childers let go of the pole and straightened. 'I could get the water if you want, and you can go ahead to Dalles and look for the oil and do them other things for Graham,' he told Boyd.

'It'd sure help me get started earlier. I could get everythin' done. You can leave it in the kitchen and I'll put it in the barrel when I get back.'

'Sure.'

'The buckets are already over to the well,' the orderly said.

'You go ahead. I'll fend to it.'

Childers waited as Boyd took his horse from the picket and waved to him when he mounted and rode off towards the settlement. He'd show that damn Adams and his precious lieutenant. He took his jacket from the railing, buttoning it as he started after the water.

When he filled the buckets he carried them up to the cabin and went around to the back where the small kitchen room extended from the main part of it. He set them down and knocked. Hearing sounds through the brown cloth pulled over the window, knowing it must be the officer's wife, Childers sensed an odd feeling that pulled inside and raced his stomach, almost like the sensation he felt before a charge.

Angela Graham was washing herself and was barefooted. She had taken off her dress and was wearing only the petticoat. She stopped soaping her arm and called to him, 'Just leave it outside, Boyd. Thank you.'

He heard her faintly. 'It ain't the orderly ma'am; it's Childers. Boyd wanted to go look for your oil and I told him I'd bring the water up. Be glad to bring it in for you.'

'Oh, I thought you were Boyd. No, thank you; I can't come to the door. Just leave it there, please.'

Childers stood and looked at the closed door, wondering what she was doing. He tried the door. It was unlocked. He turned the wooden bar and opened it partly, but in the change of light from the sun he could see nothing. Then he saw the bare foot and leg through the crack where the door hinged to the cabin.

He heard her gasp as he eased himself inside and closed the door. Angela grabbed the towel from the bench and held it in front of her.

'I told you to leave it outside,' she said. 'Please get out. Get out!'

Childers stared at the wet, glistening length of her white arm holding the towel, the water running down it, and the bare shoulders with the narrow bands of petticoat straps going over them. He looked at the folded and inanimate dress on the bench.

'Get out! Get out before I call someone.'

The whiteness over the beginning rounds of her breasts showed above the top of the towel and as he looked at it the drumming which had come in his head outside by the door came louder. There was a night's recollections of an open carpetbag and strong perfume that stung like smoke, the banjo being strummed, an emptied whisky bottle slipping from a hand and the lying, naked invitation of the swarthy Seminole girl, all a day and a century ago.

'Childers, is that your name? Listen to me. Please. Leave now and I'll forget it happened,' Angela said, frightened and tense behind the towel.

But Private Childers was in a deep well, with the drumming below him and the banjo sounds, and he saw the invitation in the woman in the circle of light above him. From his well he spoke to her. 'You ain't goin' to yell. You ain't because you don't want nobody findin' me here with you like that.'

He began ascending from the well.

'Please. Listen to me. Look at me.'

'Don't fight me. You don't want to fight me.'

He moved towards her and she backed up, now in the corner beside the stove and the water barrel.

'They'll kill you, Childers. They'll kill you. You know they will.'

'You ain't never had a soldier. It's been months. Don't fight me.'

Childers was only an arm's length from her, his eyes whetting themselves on what he could see of her neck and shoulders, the slim legs and bare feet. When he stepped forward to grab her, Angela snatched up the wooden dipper and swung it at his head; but he caught the bowl and jerked the handle out of her hands. She tried to slip past him and scraped her side on the water barrel as he caught her waist, throwing her back in the tightness of the corner and putting his hand across her mouth when she attempted to shout. His finger strength pressed on her jaw and she breathed through her nose and watched him over the edges of his hand holding her face.

'Don't fight me.'

Angela felt him pushing against her, feeling the rough uniform through her petticoat and slip, rubbing her stomach and legs and sickening her. She swallowed in her throat. She squirmed and tried to kick out with her bare feet and he hooked one of his legs around hers and she couldn't move.

'Don't cry, now don't cry. Nobody but you and me's goin' to know.'

Her sobbing choked her, stifled her breath because she couldn't draw in with his hand spread over her mouth and face. She felt him loosen his other arm around her and his hand fumble for the long skirt of her petticoat and she tried to break loose. But he held her immovable in the angle of the corner, his weight against her and his booted leg hooked behind hers. Her struggling stopped him.

'Maybe you ain't like all of 'em,' he said, and she thought he was going to release her. He smiled, his breath working. 'No, maybe you ain't. Maybe you New England kind need lovin' before.'

Holding her with the bulk of his body, he began sliding

the straps off her shoulders, his thick fingers digging under the top part of her underslip, tearing it loose.

Angela looked at him, so close, the tears hazing her vision so that she saw only his blurred face. 'Ain't it better? Ain't it? If you don't fight me I'll let go of you a little. Nod your head.' He pushed himself against her, his hand bursting and tearing inside the heavy yolk of her petticoat. 'Ain't it?'

He no longer thought or cared about what would happen to him afterward. Only the now mattered, the obsession, the aching need, the help for it. As he slid his hand around off her face and quickly put his mouth on hers, feeling the wetness of her face, there was the sudden, obliterating sound of Adams's voice.

'Childers!'

He partly loosened her and half turned as Adams came from the kitchen door and grabbed his arm, pulling him back and turning him as he hit him on the side of the face. Childers sagged momentarily, stumbling against the stove; and Angela darted past them, taking the towel and holding it around her and sobbing in her hysteria, her dark hair rumped and cascading loose around her face.

Adams's long arm moved again as his balled fist struck Childers in the stomach and the private sat down, hanging on the stove, coughing for breath. He took hold of Childers's collar and arm and dragged him along between the barrel and stove to the doorway and rolled him out on the low pair of steps. He picked up Childers's hat and sailed it out after him.

Angela had slumped down on the bench and was lying over on her arms, crying.

'Dammit,' Adams said viciously, not wanting his role, not wanting to know it had happened. 'What d you expect, comin' out here alone when they ain't seen nothin'

like you for months? This company ain't bein' wrecked fast enough, you had to help.'

He looked at her for a minute, his face pinched. As he went out and closed the door behind him, Angela kept sobbing, the towel, slipped away and forgotten, hanging from the edge of the bench under her.

Childers was sitting up and holding his stomach as Adams came 'out. He crawled up on one knee, making a grinning movement with only his lips. 'It gets you seein' her like that with me, don't it? You fightin' about her.'

'Shut up. Start walkin'. I put you fixin' a picket and come lookin' and find you totin' water up here.'

'Ain't you wonderin' if she ast me in, Sarjint?'

Adams's eyes smouldered under the overhanging forehead. 'It don't matter.'

'Yes, it does. It's killin' you because you stuck up for her.' Childers was getting his wind again. 'I'd had some of her if you hadn't come buttin' in. I'm goin' back in and show her what it's like to have a soldier.'

'No, you ain't,' Adams said, taking out his pistol and motioning with the barrel. 'Get up. You ain't goin' to be able to walk back up there.'

Childers rose slowly, his fingers spread and his arms out from his sides.

'The lieutenant ain't here so you got to use that, huh, Adams?'

'Start walkin'.'

The other soldier moved off with Adams behind him and they walked along in back of the orderly room. He stopped with Childers near the rear part of the block-house. Adams slipped the Colt back in the holster and unbuckled his sword belt. Childers's square, heavy face watched.

'You figger on fightin' me?'

Adams went on unbuttoning his jacket. Childers waited, then loosed his and slid it over his arms and drew off the red undershirt. They were in their pants and boots and naked above the waist.

'You know belt and ring, Adams?' Childers asked, holding the buckle of his leather belt suggestively. 'We played sabre your regiment started; how about one from the Second?'

Adams looked at the brass buckle—a large, rectangular cast of metal that was nearly a quarter of an inch thick. He knew it and it appealed to him. It suited him more for the beating he wanted to give Childers was more thorough than fists. 'All right.'

Childers glanced at him confidently and unfastened his belt and pulled it off quickly. He drew a circle about ten feet in diameter with his boot toe, a trenched line in the soft dirt surface. Then Childers wound a couple turns of the belt on his hand, the weighted buckle end swinging free.

'How many free whacks if one of us steps out first? Ten?'

'Fifteen,' Adams said. 'I ain't wantin' it to go on all day.'

He doubled his own belt around his long-fingered wide hand and put his other arm behind him as Childers stepped inside the circle he had made. They moved around each other and Childers feinted, then slammed the solid buckle along Adams's ear, ripping part of the lobe. He felt warm liquidness going down his neck.

The pumpkin eyes looked out at Adams. 'Thought you knew it, Adams.'

Sergeant Adams circled his hand around in the air with the belt and swung buckle edge first and it tore flesh

on Childers's jaw. But the private looped his overhand and the metal buckle weight came down on blood vessel and bone in Adams's shoulder. A paralysis went down his arm and it felt impossibly slow and detached from him as he brought his belt around and missed.

Stepping sideward and swinging his belt, the private hit Adams high against his side on the ribs where there was little flesh. Adams grunted. The feeling was coming back in his arm and he caught Childers twice with a fore slash and backhanded swing across his face. There was a swelling red welt under the private's eye and his lower lip was bleeding down over his chin.

Childers did not step backwards over the circle's edge. He spat the blood and wiped at it with his free hand and side-stepped around the perimeter until he was near the centre again with more space behind him. The two men gripped the back waistband of their pants with the hands they were holding behind them and, almost like clumsy duellers, stood facing each other and flailed with the limber, weighted belts. The irregular thunking sounds of the cast buckles hitting their bodies stopped now and then as the belts entangled and they unwound them.

The sun reflected off their bare arms and shoulders. Both of them were bloodied, sweat running in it and mixing with the dust kicked up by their feet and mottling their arms and faces. They watched each other with stained faces as they wielded the flashing belts, moving and shifting inside the small circle.

Childers brought his belt overhand again and it grazed on Adams's temple, jerking his head back, making his large body go slack as he fell forward on his knees. The private leaped towards him and lashed the belt back and forth across his naked back, the bright brass of the buckle reddening. Adams tried hard to stabilize his mind and

eyes, the blockhouse a careening colour in front of him. He was no longer aware physically of any pain as Childers beat him, only a steady jarring impact on his back. You damn fool. Taking this for her. For Graham. How did you come here, Adams. There was a merging of voices saying *Fool, fool, fool*, and he realized it was the belt striking his back.

He lashed back at Childers with his belt. He had to get up. His belt wound around the private's, and it was stand-off for a moment as the two of them tangled together. Adams pushed himself up and stumbled close to Childers in untangling the belts.

'Step out the line,' Childers lisped with his ripped lip and loosened teeth. 'You'll get off easier.'

Adams squinted and tried to focus, going sideward ponderously when the belts came loose and he sensed the other swinging at him. The belt hummed in the air going past his face. He shook his head and flexed his shoulders and his own brine stung the raw skin of his back; but he could see Childers better. He loosened the belt end and drew the loops on his hand and hit Childers across the arm, then on the shoulder.

The private dangled his own belt as he backed away and kept working his wrists in short movements. Then he jumped towards Adams, trying the overhand again. The sergeant lunged sideways, twisting clear and Childers sprawled outside the circle as he lost his tooting. Tired, their stomachs pumping in and out with their breathing sounds, the two men looked at each other. Childers rolled over on his side and rose; his arms hanging down, he waited.

'Get-back-in,' Adams huffed. 'Ain't-goin'-to-end-it-on-free-whacks.'

'Go-on. Take-'em. Them-ain't-the-rules.'

'Get-in-damn-you.'

Childers's mouth pulled up in his streaked face as he looked at him; then he came back in the circle slowly and they stalked each other. As he ducked to get inside, Adams brought his hand nearer the buckle and banged Childers hard on the cheek. The force slowed him, and Adams swung back and forth, the heavy brass hitting Childers on the neck and then on the bone behind the ear. He stood above Childers and brought almost the full length of the belt around and its weighted end thudded against Childers's head. The private bent over and tumbled forward, lying half on his shoulder, his arm under him and his head twisted around. Ralph Adams's belt moved again and again as Childers's had on his back.

Adams wiped away the blood from his mouth and nose and looked down at him. He lay inert, his big body curled around and still except for the place under his chin that moved with his breathing.

Sergeant Adams wiped at his mouth again and shambled over to the blockhouse and leaned against it, his belt hanging down from his hand. He stayed there several minutes, his chest heaving. Then he unwound the belt from his hand and began rubbing his face with a bandanna, still supporting himself against the blockhouse wall.

Adams gathered up his gear and looked at Childers. Then he walked down to the horse trough, dropped his things on the ground and immersed his head and shoulders in the water. He splashed it over him and ducked in it three or four times, letting the cold water drip from him as he hung over the trough with his hands holding the edge of it. He wet the bandanna and wiped around his face and ears.

Boyd, riding back from the Dalles settlement, saw the wet and bloodied looking figure soaking itself in the horse trough. He clucked to his horse and came galloping across the field towards Adams, sliding down quickly as he stopped, dust eddies swirling up.

'You look like a horse stomped you, Sarjint. What happened?'

The gangling, slim orderly tried to help him but Adams pushed him away.

'What happened, Sarjint?'

Adams glanced at him as he bent over to pick up his blue jacket and his sword belt and sabre. He held everything together and threw them over his shoulder, his forearm wrapped around them, and dusting his hat by pounding it on his leg. He paused before walking away.

'Childers is up behind the blockhouse,' he said. 'You better drag him down here and see if he's dead.' Then he started for the orderly room, his lacerated back still wet and the water running down his pants.

Inside the orderly room Adams put on his jacket and the other equipment. The cloth rubbed against him, and he tightened the cross-belt gingerly, settling it carefully on his shoulder. He took the remount papers from the table and went out to get his gelding and the company horses the lieutenant wanted exchanged.

The warm sun felt good as he rode along the road to the settlement, holding the lead ropes to the horses behind him. Hunched over slightly, his long chest and arms curving, Adams looked across the part of the Columbia he could see to the mountains' spans beyond. He looked at all of it without concentration and licked the hardened crust of blood in the corner of his mouth. *One of the most useless fights I ever got in,* he thought. *What good to it?* He thought of Graham, the cause of it, and his wife, and

felt nothing in whipping Childers, uncertainty boiling around in his mind about how he came to be in the cabin with her. Yes, Adams told himself. *Just like Roan said, I'm pushing them all away from me. Me and the Graham family.*

When he picked up the new horses and returned to camp the company was back from the march. They had unsaddled and a few of the dragoons were cooling their animals out, walking around with them in the exercise ring below the picket. Sergeant Adams rode underneath the shade of some trees with the remounts tied off in pairs behind him; he motioned a couple of the men over to take them and dismounted.

Corporal Roan came over while he was unsaddling and waited until the soldiers left to take the remounts down to the picket. He watched Early as he threw one of the stirrups up and started unfastening the cinch on the gelding.

'Lord amighty, Adams, you near killed Childers,' he said. 'Some of the boys got him hid out from the lieutenant until they get him fixed up.'

'Ain't that too bad.' Adams dropped the stirrup back as he finished and went around the horse to do up the long end of the cinch.

'How did it get started again? Him?'

Adams turned and looked at Roan and said nothing. Then he pulled off the saddle and started carrying it as Roan took the gelding and followed.

'Some of 'em think you worked him off the march special to whip him,' Roan said.

'Let 'em think what they want.'

The southern corporal looked at him anxiously. 'You ought to tell 'em. You ought to tell 'em you didn't, Adams. Another of them marches of Graham's today

and they're ready to blame anybody who sticks up for him on anythin'. A lot of 'em are sayin' it was just you still bein' mad because he talked about her.'

'They got Childers. Let 'em ask him.'

'He won't say nothin'. I don't figger he's goin' to.'

Adams expected the answer. No matter what else Childers might be, he got what he had from the same school. It would stay private between them.

Adams started in to the saddle rack and Roan fastened the gelding and caught Adams's arm. 'You and me's been together quite a spell, but damn, Adams, if you don't tell 'em somethin' there's most of 'em goin' to be sidin' with Childers. Thinkin' you was too rough just for what happened in the tent.'

'I ain't callin' no company meetin' to explain what I do.'

'What's happenin' to you?' Roan asked in his soft voice.

But Adams went inside the tack house with his saddle and did not answer. *Hell with them*, he thought. But he was aware of his friend behind him and knew he didn't mean it. It was Edward Shirley Graham and Angela Graham and the whole way everything was coming apart. He slammed the saddle tree on the rack, knowing it was too late to tell Graham to send her back to New England. Or Vancouver or any place.

He came back out past Roan. 'Where's the lieutenant?'

'We just got back awhile ago and he was over to the orderly room. Everybody rode along today nice and parade-like,' Roan said with elaborate sarcasm. 'He's the only one that enjoyed it. Gloves was real happy.'

He won't be, Adams thought, *when she tells him about Childers.*

'I'm goin' up to the orderly room. Tell him the new horses is here.'

He started walking up the gently down-sloping field. His back was stiff and sore and he did not swing his arms very high as he walked; he kept thinking how they were going to lose another man with no Indian battle or any fighting at all. There'd be a hanging down at Vancouver in the same place where they hung r  negade Indians.

5

LIEUTENANT GRAHAM did not see Adams returning with the remounts and after waiting a few minutes in the orderly room he left for his cabin. It had been a good march and his short steps that were like an adjutant's parade walk were brisk and jaunty. Reaching the cabin, he mounted the low stoop.

'We're back,' he said, smiling.

There was nothing of the morning in her as she crossed the room to him quickly. He kissed her. When his arms relaxed she moved against his shoulder and continued holding hers around him.

'Hey, this is a warm return,' he said and laughed, then held her back from him. 'Have I been away long enough to deserve that?'

She smiled faintly. 'How was the march?'

'Very good. We had a practice charge at Five Mile Creek and you should have seen them.' His hands were still on the slight ledges of her hips and he squeezed them against her waist. 'They will give an account of themselves when we're ready.'

He saw her wince and stopped smiling. 'What's the matter, Angela? Did I hurt you?'

'No,' she said hurriedly. 'No. I scraped my side on the barrel in the kitchen.'

'Maybe you better let me see it. Is it bad?'

'No, honestly, it's nothing, Ed. A little tender, that's all.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't know.'

He regarded her a moment, turned, and began taking

off his equipment. Angela watched him, her slender body poised and one hand drawn up, unconsciously, wanting to tell him, needing the help he could give.

But she thought what it would mean, one of his men. The soldier's death or whatever the army did, and in that Ed's own destruction. He would give up his company. The public talk about a soldier and her, public. All his service he would be going through it again. And she had come out here against what he wanted. Wasn't somehow part of the blame hers?

Angela looked at her husband and thought how much his place here meant to him in a deep personal sense, not to mention the army service he had planned, and knew she could never tell him.

Ed finished hanging up his belt and the sword and went into the kitchen dusting his jacket. He got a drink of water and, holding the cup, asked, 'Did Boyd get the oil?'

'No. I don't know. I mean, I didn't see him bring it. I'll look and see.'

'It's not important. I just wondered.' He put the cup down and pulled the lamp out and shook it. 'I guess not. It's hard to find any more; nothing coming in with most of the traders gone.'

She was aware that he was talking but it was only sounds as she thought how confused she had seemed over the oil.

'What did you say, Ed?'

He let the lamp go back against the wall and looked from the kitchen, smiling. 'I just said I guess he didn't find any lamp oil.'

There was the noise of someone on the steps outside as he came back in the room with her. He went past her to answer the door and Angela felt a flash of anxiety.

It was Sergeant Adams, an Indian with him. He gestured at the Indian. 'He brought a dispatch from the regiment,' he told Graham.

As Graham took it and began reading, Adams's eyes looked past him briefly at Angela, then back to Graham. He couldn't understand why she had not told her husband about Childers. Angela saw him stare at her and looked away from him, nervously rubbing the back of one hand, wanting to move from the door.

'They met Kamiakin's main force south of Walla Walla,' Graham said. He folded the message over. 'You better have the company assemble, Sergeant. I want to talk to them.'

'Movement orders, Lieutenant?'

'Yes.'

There was a smile on Adams's face as he saluted and left with the Nez Perce. But as he walked away from them his long face drew up in puzzlement; he had expected Childers to be in arrest by now.

Graham turned to his wife and closed the door. 'It's from Colonel Woolwinc,' he told her. 'He wants me to move the company up to Fort Walla Walla and join the rest of the regiment. I'll have to make arrangements for you.'

Angela felt a sudden panic, thinking of being separated from him now, the morning still cruel and fresh. 'I can go with you, can't I?'

'This isn't just a journey to Walla Walla,' he said. 'The regiment had to fight through to the families in the Fort. The Yakimas have gathered a siege party of nearly a thousand; he says Kamiakin is getting more braves every day.'

'But if they're in the Fort, they must have beaten the Indians.'

'If they were winning do you think they would need our company? We're the only reserve the Colonel has.'

She realized what he was not saying. 'Then they need you to help get them out. The Indians are still there. But you and the rest of them, how can you expect to get through that many? How do they think you could?'

'We don't know they will stay there. They must have lost quite a few in the fighting with our regiment, too.' He glanced at the folded message he was holding. 'We knew I would be ordered out sometime.'

Everything, the enormity of the morning, this separation, his small chances, hit her all at once and she pressed against him suddenly. 'Not so soon, Ed. Not so quickly.'

They stood together, holding each other and feeling only their own breathing. And in those moments he was not the army officer with an automation of trained sense and feeling but a young man whose love was in the fumbling, hard way he took her, the pressures of his kisses on her face and mouth.

'You think you will be so ready,' she said after a while. 'You imagine going through it and it doesn't frighten you because it hasn't really happened.'

'It will only be a few weeks, Angela.'

She moved and brushed the dark loose strands of hair back to the side. 'When will you leave?'

'Tomorrow. The Cornishes said you could stay with them if I was ordered away. I'll send one of the men in to tell them.'

Angela looked at him and smiled. 'I'll separate the things you'll need.'

As she went towards the bedroom, he called after her, 'Not too much. It all has to go on a horse.'

He put on his belt and hat and she came to the door with him as he left. She heard him walking away, and

the memory of the soldier and the morning camp harshly as she leaned against the door, her head pressed into it.

As Sergeant Adams saw the lieutenant approaching, he brought the company at attention. Graham returned his salute.

'Be at ease,' he told them. They shuffled around in the unfamiliar dismounted formation.

'One of the friendlies came in a while ago with a dispatch from Colonel Woolwine. He met a large force of Yakimas near Fort Walla Walla and the regiment took pretty heavy casualties reaching the Fort. He wants this company to reinforce him.'

The dragoons looked around at each other, smiles breaking; it was what they wanted. It was what Adams wanted.

'I wish we could've had a few more days,' Graham said.

'These ain't new men, Lieutenant,' Adams said. 'They're ready. They've been fightin' redskins quite a spell.'

Graham smiled oddly, as if he had expected Adams's defence. 'Discipline isn't killing Indians.'

What kind of officer was he? Adams wondered. He had never seen one like him even from the Point. Maybe some of the men were right. Maybe he *was* afraid.

Lieutenant Graham saw the eyes going away from his and the tightening of their faces, but he did not show it outwardly.

'Make up your rolls tonight,' he told them. 'We're moving out for Walla Walla after reveille. Commissary issue before we mount.'

'I suppose the lieutenant wants to let the inspection go tomorrow then?' Adams asked.

'No, Sergeant.'

He called them to attention, turned them back to Adams, and was gone.

Adams dismissed them and they stood around shifting their feet, waiting until Graham was some distance away, listening to his footsteps going regularly back towards his cabin. Sam Beard, who was half Chocktaw, let his sabre make a clicking noise as he dropped it back in the scabbard.

'Tomorrow we see mebbe the book saxe Yakimas. Tomorrow we see if we got man. I don't think so, mebbe.'

It summed up simply what they all thought.

Graham felt the tensing of his men behind him when he left the formation. He sensed their anger about the company's discipline, had seen it in the challenging way Adams's black eyes went into him. He had depended on it against the thousand Yakimas. Nothing disciplines a man as much as telling him he has none.

Angela had finished packing when he came back to the cabin and was changing to her night clothes. He saw the extra saddlebags and riding skirt she had left out. He picked the skirt up from the trunk and held it.

'There isn't any need to ride in yourself tomorrow. You won't need these,' he said. **'The Cornishes will come out and take you back in their buggy.'**

She tied her long hair in back and came over to him, her slim body curving where the coarse nightgown was tied around her waist. **'I'm going with you, Ed.'**

'Angela, we talked about it. I wish you could. I wish there were some way.'

'There are other women at Walla Walla. They got there with their husbands.'

He looked at her, the black hair pulled away from the

pale length of throat, and laid the skirt on the trunk. 'Don't make it harder. They would feel responsible for you; it wouldn't be fair to them. You didn't see how the Yakimas treated the missionary family at Celilo. A white woman, a soldier's wife, would be like sending Karriakin a message. I couldn't take you with us.'

'The women at Walla Walla, some of them are soldiers' wives,' she persisted. 'Am I different, Ed, because I was raised in New England?'

He took hold of the iron bedstead, turning away from her. 'There were treaties when they went there. There was no war with the Indians.'

Angela touched his shoulder and waited until he looked at her again. 'Ed, I love you. I want to stay with you.' When he stood there and did not say anything, she asked, 'Do you always have to be so perfect in what you believe, unwilling to see that your wife can have normal feelings and maybe not be perfect, the way you think? I know what it is to you to be in the army, how you feel about it, being the best in your grade.'

'It's what they pay me for, Angela. The army has a right to expect it.'

She knew it was partly what drove him, made him what he was. And the other she had seen long before the army, that first day in Albany. His smallness, that seemed to force him always to prove himself.

'Ed, you're going with them on it, these men in your company. You'll have to depend on them. I want you to be liked,' she said. 'Don't make it so hard for everyone to understand you.'

'I can't go around clapping everyone on the back,' he answered. 'Can't you see? They would think I was unsure, hardly qualified to tell them what to do.'

'I don't mean that. Just let them know you a little.'

Graham, who loved her and who loved the army, only differently, believed she could never feel what it was.

'You can stay with the Cornish family until we get back,' he said; and it did not have to be said again.

They came together by the iron bed, in the instinct of their love, and Angela felt herself crying. She had tried not to; but it came, almost as something separate from her. He felt her hair's coolness against his neck and did not want to leave it.

It was after they had saddled and finished with the mounted inspection that Roan loped up on his horse where Adams was waiting at the head of the column of dragoons. He turned the bay quickly, hard, more viciously than he ever rode an animal.

'That damn lieutenant took two of my men and put 'em on the wagons because they had their sabres tied on the saddle instead of wearin' 'em,' he told Sergeant Adams. 'Two of the best dragoons in this here company, doin' detail.'

'They're supposed to wear their sabres,' Adams answered.

They moved their horses back near the corner of the blockhouse to let one of the supply wagons past. It rumbled on down towards the end of the company column.

'I don't know why you side with him,' Roan said. 'You don't like him. You know the cap'n would never pull somethin' like this. Runnin' the company with a regular gig business like the 'Cademy.'

'He does what he has to do. He thinks he's doin' right. You ain't never goin' to change him. I'll tell him you stuck up for your men; he'll understand that.'

Adams grinned in that narrow way of his, and Corporal

Roan grunted and spurred his horse back towards his place in the line.

Sergeant Adams started away from the blockhouse and saw the buggy with Mrs Graham. It had been around the corner of the log building from them and they had not seen her. Adams wanted to go on back to the column, but he didn't. He turned his horse beside the buggy, out of his element and embarrassed because he knew she had heard them. And he was remembering the thing with Childers.

'Mornin', Missus Graham,' he said.

She looked up at the long-legged sergeant, her face strained with meeting him. 'Roan doesn't know him, Sergeant Adams,' she said, an odd pleading in her eyes. 'You don't understand him. None of you do. You have to try. Please.'

He moved on the horse a little, wanting to go and wishing he had not stopped.

'Please, Sergeant. Promise you'll try. Some day you will know what I'm trying to say.'

Adams, not knowing what else to answer, said, 'Yes, ma'm.' Then he touched his hat and pulled the gelding around slowly, riding aimlessly towards the wagons in the rear because he didn't want to go back where he had been, where she could still see him. *Anyway, he thought, it'll take more than me to undo all the trouble she and her husband have caused.*

Lieutenant Graham came out of the orderly room followed by two civilians, a boy and a man. They stopped by the buggy with Angela and the man got up and took the reins as Graham mounted his horse and brought himself alongside the buggy.

'Doctor Cornish will look after you,' he told her. 'We'll be back soon.'

'Take care of yourself, Ed.' She sat very, stiff in the light rig.

'Good-bye, Angela.'

The buggy passed him and he sat on the grey, a small erect figure, waving to her as the buggy turned out of the camp towards the Dalles settlement. Then he rode over to where Adams had returned to his place with the leading horsemen. He looked back along the column, raised his gloved hand. 'F'aaahd, ho!'

In the spanning ground basin near Wallula Gap and along the brown- and black-tinged bank of the Snake south of Walla Walla, Kamiakin's Indian army, built careless fires. They had met the Bostons and their great chief Crooked Leg; and the hundreds of Yakimas and Klickitat warriors danced and sang of their individual braveries in the battle near Wild Horse Creek.

Among the sprawled camps of wickiups and scattered separate fires they leaped and danced, shaking their lances and short bows of cedar or bone. The bows were made with fish-glue and deer sinew wrappings and were only thirty inches in length; but they did not seem small after you had faced them once or twice. Winter leggings and skin jackets had been left in their village lodges and they wore only the azian clouts and moccasins, with smears of war-red sumac and flower dyes over their naked bodies. One had thrown his trophy, a blue dragoon jacket, over his shoulders and whirled and danced with the armless sleeves flapping around him; another had pushed a visored Albert down on his head and his family feathers were sticking inside the black leather front strap that was for the chin. To them, Wild Horse Creek was a victory over the Bostons and the preaching of the subchiefs brought new warriors. More struck the tribal post and came down from the mountains in their decked war parties to join

Kamiakin, representations streaming up even from south of the Columbia in the blood pledge of five years of war. They were confident.

When the wind was right, Colonel Woolwine and his dragoon regiment and the civilians crowded inside the Walla Walla stockade could sometimes faintly hear the Indian shouts and they could always see the smoke from the fires. He had lost more than thirty men in the two days' fighting at Wild Horse Creek. His five under-strength dragoon companies shared the narrow enclosed space of the Fort with the settlers and missionaries who had escaped the ranging Indian war parties and reached Walla Walla. Wagons, horses, soldiers, children and steamy family camps were jammed across the open area of the stockade. A horseway had been kept clear near the stockade gates for the movement of the army patrols that passed back and forth continuously scouting Kamiakin.

With the provisions and stores they had, Colonel Woolwine knew it could not be a long siege even if Kamiakin did not attack immediately. Hardly more than a third of the civilians had brought any food; most had saved only themselves and their wagons. The infantry he had been promised at Vancouver was still a month's march away; Kamiakin and his people were less than twenty minutes.

So Woolwine, whom the Indians called Crooked Leg, wasted no staff discussion on the force he had tried to hold out at Dalles. He had sent the dispatch to F Company knowing he was committing his only reserve, knowing one company was hardly a tangible margin in beating Kamiakin and getting the civilians through to Vancouver and the coast. But whatever he did, he would have to

do it with the help of F Company; so he did not moon over his decision.

When the Indian had been sent with the dispatch, Woolwine and his executive officer stood around outside in the disarray of cluttered encampments and wagons and the more regular files of his two hundred and twelve remaining dragoons. He met the returning patrols when they came in, climbed to the firing walk around the wall, watched and talked with the sentry detail—and waited.

‘Nothing but reports of more Indians joining him,’ he told the executive. He looked down at the numbers of women and children, the unweildy settler wagons. ‘Makes that one company at Dalles pretty damned important, doesn’t it?’

‘If Osey gets through to them with the dispatch,’ the major said.

‘The Perce will get to them all right. I’m worrying about F Company. Kamiakin seems to be concentrating most of his people south of us, the way they’ll have to come. What’s that officer’s name who has it?’

‘Graham, sir. Brand new.’

‘Yes, he’s the one who replaced Canby. Well,’ he said, turning back and watching through the firing slit on the wall, ‘he’ll get old pretty fast bringing them up here past Kamiakin.’

But there was no humour in his face. The forty blades of F Company were vital. And he knew the chances it was taking, getting through eleven or twelve hundred warriors.

‘Colonel, even with F Company, we’re going to have a devil of a time trying to get all these people out. Trying to engage with Kamiakin and protect a wagon train of nearly two hundred civilians with less than three hundred men.’

'We aren't going to sit inside this stockade and wait,' Colonel Woolwine said. 'Only way we can come close to evening up with their number is to be moving and fighting them on horse.' He looked at the executive. 'Kamiakin has enough braves now to take this Fort in ten days. I don't intend to wait for that, even if we had the food and stores.'

Both of them turned back to watching, thinking about how much depended on the unit under the new lieutenant at Dalles.

Many miles downstream the little column of Company F set out, their dragoon flag carried open and the fierce pride of the long knives in its faded colours. The Yakima scouts might see it and smile among themselves about the military rules and the lack of stealth of the pony soldiers and perhaps admire a little the men they had to kill.

Once outside the settlement Graham led them in a twisting and doubling maze along shadow lines of trees and through covered ravines where they moved single file and took the wagons and pack animals around. He made them move without visible movement, covering their trails a hundred ways, men and horses and wagons disappearing like a caravan moving into the desert and out of sight.

There were no cooking fires in the daylight; at night the few he allowed were dug in and hidden by blanket flies. These men who had moved before with challenging openness against Indians now moved as shadows across the ground. They grumbled and obeyed. It would be temporary. They were dragoons.

And it was Graham's company who saw the Yakimas first. Sam Beard and Hardish, scouting far ahead of the

others, came on them, squatted and gorged on hunt meat, careless and noisy, but a war party because their women were not with them. The two scouts watched and rode back from the security point to the main column of dragoons. Two miles behind, they came on the company head and rode alongside Graham and Adams.

'Big party,' Beard said, his round, lama-like face happy. 'Two, three miles, mebbe. Old fires. Plenty good for us.'

'How many you figger they are?' Adams asked.

'Eighty or more, I reckon,' Hardish answered. 'Yakimas. Careless and invitin'.'

'I'll ride up and take a look, Lieutenant,' Sergeant Adams said, his dark eyes sparkling. 'Sounds like they got tired waitin' for Kamiakin to move on the Fort and splintered off. It ought to be easy, two or three good charges.'

'We're going around them.'

'Lieutenant, this's a chance to get ourselves some Injun troops. Bellyin' up to that meat thinkin' how they're winnin' this war,' Adams told him, his lips drawn narrowly. Graham couldn't know he was remembering the Cascades or that it was this memory that made Adams's face look as it did.

'Our job is to reinforce Colonel Woolwine at Walla Walla. We're not going to do anything else, Sergeant. Our mission is to get through to the Fort. We're going to comply with those orders.'

'You ain't goin' to pass this up? A chance like this, Lieutenant?' Adams asked, incredulous, and under it the anger coming in him.

'We're not going to attack them. We'll infiltrate two or three riders at a time if we have to, until the whole company is past them.'

Sam Beard and Hardish sat their horses and watched

Sergeant Adams, waiting. His voice came harsh to them. 'All right, you heard the lieutenant. Get back up there and keep your eyes on that party. Tell the flank scouts. We're goin' around.'

The information whispered back along the column of dragoons. *Graham was afraid to fight.* Their loyalty, honed by the soft and the strong and the sometimes cold voice of Adams, was lost now. They were soldiers who doubted the courage of one of them. And the hours of dismounted drill and discipline within discipline returned in their minds now and made them sullen. Their accusal and tension hung and burned like the heat of the still Oregon sun.

At their head rode the small, blue-coated Graham, a square sculpture that seemed as unmindful of their anger as he was of the occasional switching of his grey's tail.

'By God, hope this ole horse whinnies at them Injun ponies,' a dragoon said back in the column. But he rode with his hand out and his body forward, ready to close around the horse's nose. Broodingly, the company obeyed.

'You forgettin' what these people did to the cap'n?' Corporal Roan asked Adams as he passed him where he was turning the company.

'You're a corporal. You don't take sides against your officer,' Adams said flatly. 'You heard the order.'

But he rode ahead and caught up with Lieutenant Graham as they circled out two or three miles around the Yakima party. He watched the rhythmic horsemanship of the officer; he watched the young face and wide-looking eyes. *Damn him,* he thought. *Running this company with his scientific war. And his yellow streak.*

'They think we're runnin' away from a fight, Lieutenant.' He almost said 'again.'

Graham did not turn. 'We are.'

'We got to run up on some of 'em, maybe the siege party itself. Could of made it better, Lieutenant, gettin' rid of this party. They wefe cocky; didn't even have guards out.'

The other turned and his face seemed as barren as Adams's. 'We would have lost men, Sergeant. Our mission is to reinforce the regiment with the whole company. We're going to accomplish that. My personal popularity was never part of my orders.'

— Like something right out of the classroom, Adams told himself, 'Yessh, Lieutenant.'

The small company of soldiers crept around the Yakimas, blanket strips muffling their metal sounds, dragoons cursing the sabres they didn't want to wear, and Hardish and the Chocktaw Beard picking their way along the down-side of the ridges as they fixed on the Yakimas and watched them for movement or sign. *Like the shameless coyote circles the sleeping bear, like the shameless coyote circles the sleeping bear, like the shameless coyote circles the sleeping bear*, the white-feather legend came in the plopping of the horses' hoofs to the men.

They passed carefully, the riders threading their way slowly and skilfully; in two hours the wagons, which had gone out farther along the screening of the trees and the ridge following the river, caught up with them. The column rode into a wide corridor below the wooded hills that went down to the river plain.

Graham separated them at the river's edge and made them water in groups of twos and threes, returning to concealment in the closely spaced pines where they had stopped. He walked among the dragoons as they rested, aware of their staring silence and economy of reply when he asked them about their horses or themselves. The revenge had been there in the lazy digesting braves, the

revenge for their captain, and the soft-faced boy of an officer had taken it and with it their honour. He had wanted them to live by regulation, by the book. They gave him that. It was regulation, nothing more, that held them now.

But Graham would not show them he knew. He moved off by himself on the landspit that curved into the swift-running Columbia and watched the water. He thought of Angela, what she had told him. But he was right. How can you issue apologies for orders? The army trusted you. The intangible thing that was not one man or one mind or one anything, trusted you. Men believed. They had to look at you and know they could believe. Your own feelings had no right to interfere in this. He was right, he told himself again. It must be like that to survive.

Sergeant Adams saw him standing alone and walked out beside him, drawn unconsciously to watching the moving water with him.

'There's no ford 'long here,' he said. 'Only one's near the Fort.'

'It was hard for them, wasn't it?'

The recognition surprised Adams but it didn't change anything. 'They ain't used to runnin' away, Lieutenant.'

'It's sometimes harder to run than fight,' the lieutenant said, and kicked a loose stone in the water and watched it slide away into the depths. Then he swung round and put his gloves on carefully. 'We'll wait here until the scouts report back. Tell the men.'

Adams, his dark face darker under the shading visor and the overshadowing trees, watched him walk back to his slim-legged grey. Adams returned to where most of the men were sitting around under the trees, resting. He dropped down beside Corporal Roan, his long calves and thighs stretched out flat on the ground.

'We wait until Sam Beard finds Kamiakin and his main party,' he announced.

'Hope them Yakimas knows we're fightin' by the book and won't take no 'vantage of us while we're manoeuvring,' one of the dragoons said.

'Shut up,' Adams said with quiet viciousness.

The man stood up and looked at him a minute, then shrugged and ambled away. A few others followed. Corporal Roan looked at them, put his hands behind his head, ~~took~~ ^{locked} the fingers together and laid back on their pillow.

'No need gettin' all riled,' he said. 'Maybe that old boy was just sayin' what they're all thinkin'.'

'Let him keep his thinkin' to hisself,' Adams said, his black eyes fastening on something in front of him. 'Don't need no private soldiers tellin' us how to run this company. This company sure is changin'.'

Roan glanced over at him and then looked down at Lieutenant Graham below them, working on his saddle roll. 'It sure is,' he said.

Adams knew it was Graham who made him flare at the soldier; the thought smouldered in him because he had acted like a recruit. He rose abruptly and pulled the long-ended Colt around off his loins and went over and began needlessly inspecting the loosened girth on his horse. *Just like you*, he thought as his hand drew along the horse's warm belly and the gelding looked around at him. *Kicking out at anybody when you're mad.*

He saw Boyd sitting against a tree, holding a piece of paper on his knee and writing. Adams went over near him.

'What're you doin'?' ,

Boyd looked up from wetting the pencil in his mouth and smiled with his sheepish kind of embarrassment, covering the paper with his hand. 'I'm keepin' a history of

our march. When I get me four or five fogies in this army and the fightin' is all over, I can set down and read about how it was.'

'That's a hell of a waste of time,' Adams told him. Then he peered down at where Boyd held the paper. 'I didn't know you could write.'

'Sure I can. I might even make up some stories from what I get put down.'

'Let me see it.'

He handed it to him and Adams looked at the printed letters, going light and dark where Boyd had wet the pencil: *Reilly at 3 Am, left at 5. No Injuns. 1 da ride to Day Choote. 10 miles (guessed). Mud Springs next. About 11 miles. Lt. put wagons in middle of column, 20 men behind.* Boyd was keeping his history in great detail.

He handed it back to him and shrugged and started off. He stopped, looking back at Boyd. 'There's some map paper in my saddle pouch. I ain't goin' to use it,' he said. 'You can have it if you want.'

'I sure do, Sarjint. It's hard gettin' anythin' to write on.'

'Well,' Adams said, 'just don't be messin' up my roll.'

THE SCOUTS came riding back like flushed quail as they descended the slopes ahead of the tree area where the company waited. Their horses were sweat-flecked and ~~blown~~ when they rode in and dismounted.

'Kamiakin's got hisself ever' brave what can tote a gun or bow down out of mountains,' Hardish told the lieutenant. 'Eight hundred of 'em or better. Klickitats and some others with 'em, too. You oughta to see 'em.'

'You think it's the main siege party?'

'Yessir, Lieutenant. Ain't no doubt. Is there, Sam?'

Beard nodded. 'Plenty braves.'

And as he often did when English didn't come fast enough he lapsed in the hand language of his people. He held out his hands, their palms up, then brought them in front of his face with their backs to his eyes, moving them left in a small circle.

Graham watched him, and behind the lieutenant Adams and Hardish looked at each other and grinned. This would show him how wet the backs of his ears were.

'Sam doesn't agree with you. He thinks there are closer to a thousand of them,' Graham said to Hardish.

'Yessir,' Hardish managed to answer. 'Well, Lieutenant, Sam's got a better eye on that than me. I figger he's closer to bein' right.'

It amazed Adams that Graham could know any of the plains sign language, or that he could read Beard's half sleepy way of making it. The same feeling had come before when he saw Graham sitting alone in the orderly

room with the lamp out, taking a Sharps carbine apart and putting it together again over and over there in the darkness. When it came like this he thought the little officer must have spent every spare minute studying Indians and weapons or any of the dozens of things where Adams had seen his unexpected familiarity; and in that brief while Adams admired him professionally. But it always passed because he would remember something else he did, like the endless inspections and sabre drill, the training march. Or running around the Yakima war party.

'Guess Casino and his braves want in on takin' Walla Walla,' Adams said. 'Make him a big chief like he was once, with all them slaves he brought into Vancouver carpetin' the ground with furs for him.'

Lieutenant Graham looked thoughtful. He asked Adams, 'Sergeant, if you were Kamiakin and had this position, how would you put your braves?'

'Don't make much difference, does it, Lieutenant? We ain't sortie-in' through a thousand of 'em.'

'It's a military question, Sergeant.'

Now we're going to stand here and discuss tactics and manoeuvres, Adams thought. *Maybe even refight some of the Mexican war.* But the lieutenant waited.

He shrugged and looked at Graham. 'Keep my toe on the bottom of the mountains much as I could. Kar kin ain't goin' to let his tribe get far away from their lodges in the Cascades, but he wants to keep Walla Walla blocked off. Don't guess I'd count too much on the Klicks or them others; the Klicks won't stay if it gets hard. He ain't their chief even if they are blood-related and the Klicks ain't so religious-minded about a war chief that ain't one of their own.'

'That's what I think, tog,' Graham said. 'He won't

move too far with all the braves down in the valley and nothing but squaws or dog soldiers and old men watching their villages. They won't stretch all the way to the river. They will stay massed, keeping room to move back up in the mountains when they want to.'

'That's fine, Lieutenant, only we can't swim up the Columbia or get across it here. That's Klickitat country on the other side, even if we could get across the river. Get engaged with some of them and Kamiakin and his main party'd come around behind us on this side and box us real good.'

'There's a way to flank them.'

Adams and the two scouts looked at each other, and Adams said, 'Some people hold the Injuns don't have flanks, Lieutenant.'

'So I've heard,' Lieutenant Graham replied as though he were a hundred years old. 'I think they're wrong. Let's ride up forward and see this siege party.'

They swung on their horses and the four of them went back up the slopes, the shadowing horizon line of the high rising Cascades west of them. After a few miles Beard signalled and they stopped and tied their horses in a patch of good foliage, then followed him up a steep bank where there was no trail. Two or three hundred yards higher, where the undergrowth thinned and fell away in a bald, almost grassless cliff of rocks they crawled on their stomachs up to the edge of the short weeds and bushes. They lay and peered down from where the scouts had been.

In the wide defilade of wooded ridge and descending river basin that ran several miles across in front of them, they saw the Yakimas. Hundreds of them scattered and spread over the ground like black-dotted herds of bison; ponies and braves and smoke from the fires reaching two

miles or more. They were in the ravines and the gullies and the long flat reaches between, seeming from this distance to sway back and forth like a huge grainfield rippling in the wind.

'More Injuns in one place than I ever see,' the unawable Sergeant Adams said in awe. 'There sure must be near a thousand of 'em. A whole army. No wonder the regiment had a time reachin' the Fort.'

'What do you make of it?' Graham asked. 'It looks like they're camped. The Fort can't be more than eight or twelve miles the other side of them.'

'Guess they ain't in no hurry with no white men left between here and the Dalles, 'ceptin' us and the people in the Fort. They figger they can move on Walla Walla when they're ready.'

Sam Ward looked over at them through the mesh of grass. 'Kamiakin got to move plenty soon. Mebbe some braves go home.'

'Yeah,' Adams agreed, watching the Yakimas. 'Ain't much dancin' goin' on down there. Walla Walla's a fair stockade and I don't guess they relish attackin' it none. But they ain't goin' to wait forever, neither.'

Lieutenant Graham stared off towards the river running along far to their left, some miles away, his wide eyes narrowing in the sun sheen as he studied the ground along where the ridge began descending to the river bar. He watched awhile and moved to see it from another angle. In a few minutes he crawled back to them and motioned and they worked their way back down from the crest towards the horses.

The four men came down quietly and slipped through the knee-high grass and weeds growing on the steep bank, slid down its dirt face. They reached the thicket and led out the horses, mounting up and riding with their

carbines unslung. But they did not see any Yakimas wandering around the fringes of the war party's camps as they rode towards the river.

They reached the patrol perimeter of the company and one of the dragoons signalled them past. For another quarter of a mile or so they followed the river, then rode into the temporary bivouac among the concealing black pines.

After they dismounted Lieutenant Graham broke a stick and made some lines on the ground.

'Here's the river,' he told Adams. 'Here they are. This is Walla Walla where the river bends north again. If we moved along here we could get past them to the Fort.'

Adams looked at where he had drawn the stick, and almost laughed. 'That's up the river, Lieutenant. How do you figger on doin' that? Even if the current 'long here was easier, the horses could never swim that far, haulin' a rider with 'em.

'You're right,' Graham said. 'That's exactly what the Yakimas think. They won't be watching the river because they're sure no force could come up that way, not swimming their horses. I don't expect they'll have any number of sentries at all.'

Adams wondered why they were going through something they both knew.

Lieutenant Graham tossed the stick away and looked up at him. 'The *Wasco* had a fairly good-sized bateau that could carry fifteen or twenty men. There should be another boat somewhere at Dalles, maybe from the grounded steamer by the landing. With the men we have, less the ones we left at the Cascades blockhouse and Dalles, there are thirty-one of us,' he said. 'Two boats would be enough.'

'It'd take at least seven or eight days to ride back to

Dalles and bring 'em down. What if Kamiakin moves before then?'

Graham glanced around at the dragoons and their horses spread among the trees. A calculated risk, they had taught him.

'I'll have to take that chance, Sergeant.'

And on this the schools of both of the men met; that of Adams with his dedicated professionalism, and the systematic training of Graham.

'I'll get 'em mounted up right away, Lieutenant. Figger it'll take eight men.'

'Put Corporal Roan in charge of the patrol. I'll give him a message obligating the army for the boats. Tell him I'd like to brief him before he leaves. I want to make sure he understands the absolute need for secrecy in his movement. No skirmishing.'

After Lieutenant Graham talked to Roan and he left with his patrol and the wagons, the lieutenant sent two scouts towards Walla Walla, three or four miles beyond the security patrol he had posted around the company's perimeter. They were to watch Kamiakin's large war party. The remaining dragoons settled the temporary camp under the clustered pines near the Columbia's bank and picketed the horses. Now and then they glanced towards the east where the slopes climbed away from the river valley, where the scouts would come if the Yimas and Klickitats began moving towards them or Fort Walla Walla.

The hump-backed shadows of the mountains moved afternoon into evening. The scouts changed. Kamiakin was still there. The Oregon night moved darkly around them with only a pale crescent of a moon; and, knowing the Indian's dislike for dying at night the dragoons relaxed and slept between guard reliefs.

Adams saw Graham walking in the area after most of them were asleep, sitting down on the river's edge for a while and then going out to the rim of the trees and looking off in the direction the patrol had gone.

From the time he left the company's camp on the river, Corporal Roan rode along unnaturally cheerless and silent, fuming with the instructions Graham had given him on ~~hiding~~ his movements and avoiding any skirmish with Indians. The lieutenant had gone over and over them, tiresomely, all very detailed and basic, and that provoked him nearly as much. But he put a front scout out when they approached the Yakima party still encamped above Wild Horse Creek and led the patrol in a wide and careful track around it.

He followed almost the same route as the company had after he passed the Yakimas and continued towards Dalles. In his mood, the encumbering wagons which would not let him move the way he wanted to annoyed him. During the day he kept riding back to them and yelling at the drivers to keep up; in the mornings when they were breaking camp they didn't harness fast enough.

At Umatilla one of the wagons mired crossing the ford and Roan got off his bay and took the team himself, jerking the lines away from the dragoon who was driving.

'What's gettin' in you?' the soldier asked. 'Because you're sick of the lieutenant and how he's runnin' things, don't be takin' it out on us.'

'If I had me some men that could handle their wagons I wouldn't be havin' no trouble.'

The driver knew the southern corporal; he wasn't really the screaming patrol leader they had now. He took back the reins when the wagon climbed up the bank and

the two dragoons who had helped pull it out unfastened their horses. Roan started to slide down from the wagon box and the driver caught his arm.

'Corp'rul, we're doin' our best to keep up. Ain't none of us like hidin' from Injuns any more than you. We was with the captain, too. Don't forget.'

Corporal Roan hesitated, his legs drawn up and ready to jump; then he let them down dangling on the side and held the edge of the seat. 'I guess you're right. We're all of us miserable enough without me helpin' it.' He dropped to the ground and took his horse from one of the other men and when they started again he slowed the pace.

The patrol reached Dalles the next morning and while the others tended the horses and rested, Roan went to the landing for the boats. The *Wasco* was down-river but he found a flat-bottomed dory that was all right when the owner took off the fishing platform; and the steamer agent released an old spare bateau they had been using around the landing. The civilians helped them load the two boats and Roan hurried his men in getting them lashed to the wagon beds.

They were ready to start back at noon. Roan put three of them behind the wagons and he and two others rode ahead of them down the slight descent from the settlement, passing the low, green-mossed islands near the river bank and drawing away from the terraced stone beds of the Dalles, which were washed and crystal-looking with the sun going off them.

'We goin' to camp at Des Chutes, Corp'rul?' the dragoon riding beside Roan asked as they began stringing out along the road.

Roan sent the other dragoon ahead to scout before answering. 'No, I want to make Mud Springs. I don't want to be a month takin' these boats back.'

'That's nearly thirty miles.'

'You want to get back, don't you? Or you want to be luggin' these ferries all over Oregon while the rest of 'em is doin' your fightin' for you?'

'Well, sure, Corp'ul. We want to get back.'

'All right then, boy. We got to make better time than we did comin' up, even with them.' He thumbed back at the boats. *

Roan brought the patrol to a brisk march gait and held it. They reached Mud Springs, Rock Creek, then Willow Creek and were crossing Bitter Creek and closing on the Umatilla in three days and two camps. Roan roused them at 3 a.m. and they rode until the full, late dark of the summer nights. They averaged twenty-five miles a day and on the third day they made thirty-two. Probably the forced training marches and forced rides and drills of Graham's helped as much as Roan's constant urging; but none of them thought of it, or if they did, they were too tired and sceptical of the lieutenant's worth to care.

It was in the middle of the day when they reached the place where the Yakima party was. But the scout came back to the waiting patrol and told Roan they had left. He saw for himself the remnants of the few parts of an animal the Yakima threw away, sunburned and decaying now, and the fluttering birds going up with the patrol's noise.

'They'd be feedin' on somethin' besides hunt leavin's if we had an officer like Canby was,' one of them said.

Roan thought of how Graham had denied them. The sight of the empty camp made him angry as he remembered the two opportunities they had lost because of the lieutenant.

'Ah, come on,' he told them. **'Ain't nothin' here. Let's get movin'.'**

But as they moved off the scout who had gone out came

galloping from the wedge of trees ahead of them. He slapped the reins around on the horse's neck and pulled up beside Roan.

'There's about eight or nine Yakimas up there waterin' at the creek. Maybe a half mile or so.'

'They all alone?'

He nodded. 'I went all 'round 'em. I expect they're stragglers from that hunt party. They're drawin' some skins and bundlin' 'em.'

Roan paused, thinking how easy it might be. He still smarted over Graham's cautious instructions and his mind chafed a little with the thought of how even Adams seemed to be going along with him too much. They never would get a chance for anything with the lieutenant ducking every Indian he saw. He looked around at his men, at the scout. He knew how they felt.

'They still there?' he asked.

'Was when I come back just now.'

He signalled his patrol to close up, and when they circled around him he motioned to the drivers on the wagons, "Pull 'em off to the side and get mounted up."

Roan waited while the two moved into a dry wash and dead hitched the teams, then untied their horses from the back of the wagons and rode over with the rest.

'There's a small party of Yakimas up there by the creek,' he told them. 'I can't see where the lieutenant can get mad if we jump 'em, now we got the boats and are almost back. I don't want to charge 'em because some of 'em are liable to get away and put the big party to trailin' us. We'll divide up and box 'em from both sides the creek.'

The dragoons grinned at each other and unslung the carbines from their shoulders. He sent three of them off with the scout and took the rest of the patrol and circled

out behind the trees, riding down the creek far enough to cross and come down behind the Yakimas. They dismounted on the other side when they were as near as they could ride the horses and hung their sabres on the saddles and slipped along the creek bank. In a few minutes they saw the Indians working with the skins or rolling them. A few of the ponies were standing in the water, drinking.

Roan waited until he saw the others moving through the woods across the creek. Suddenly one of the Indian ponies smelled the air and nickered and there was a rush of the Yakimas as they began mounting. Roan and his men started firing, unable to wait for the other dragoons to get in position. The first aimed volley killed four of the Yakimas but the others were scrambling on their ponies and trying to head up along the edge of the creek.

'Cut 'em off!' Roan yelled as the rest of the patrol appeared on the bank across from him. He reloaded the Sharps quickly and ran along the bank after the Indians, whose ponies were slowed by the deep water.

There were shots from the other side of the creek and another Yakima fell from his horse into the overhanging bushes. Roan and his group fired at the other three warriors. One of the dragoons across from them had reached his horse, and Roan saw him break out of the trees almost parallel with the escaping braves. The dragoon stopped and used his pistol and one of the Yakimas jerked his pony's head around violently as both horse and rider foundered in the creek.

'We got to catch them other two!' Roan shouted, and ran back with the others for their horses. They mounted and charged through the tree branches and high water bushes along the creek's edge in pursuit of the two warriors. They saw the other four dragoons angling towards

the bank on the opposite side, and the entire patrol rode after the escaping Indians.

These were Yakimas, to whom horse-racing was a natural skill, and the dragoons lost them. Roan broke the patrol into two-man parties and they searched for trail along the creek bank. After looking uselessly for nearly a half hour he realized they were getting too far away from the wagons and he reassembled them and headed back.

'They just disappeared,' the scout commented. 'They ain't no catchin' 'em when they get to runnin'.'

They were all uneasy about having lost the Indians, but another patrol member tried to pass it off. 'Well, we got us five or six of 'em, anyway.'

The remark went unanswered and the man himself fell silent.

They assembled in column again with the wagons and crossed the creek. Roan dropped one of them back as rear scout, knowing the two Yakimas were part of the larger hunting party.

'If them bucks put the rest of their people on us it ain't goin' to be hard trailin' us with them damned wagons.'

Roan looked at the one who spoke and kept riding.

'You goin' to tell the lieutenant?'

'Sure. I ain't goin' to hide nothin',' Roan said.

'Aw, I don't think it'll put 'em on the whole company. The big party probably ain't nowheres near.'

But none of them believed it. They knew the danger in letting the Indians escape to report that there was any army in the area.

When Roan's patrol did not return with the boats on the eighth day, Adams thought they might have been

discovered by the earlier party of Yakimas. Enough time, he told himself. He knew Roan and his southern talent on horseback; and his big bay was fast and made those who travelled with him fast. They should be back.

Twice he rode out to where the outposts were patrolling and when they shook their heads, he rode several miles past them towards Dalles. But he saw nothing. No Yakimas. No Roan. Nothing.

Near midnight he lay awake, his six-and-a-half feet sprawled on the ground and his forearms crossed under his head, hearing the occasional chewing of one of the picketed horses. Two scouts who had been relieved rode into the area and he heard the leather creaking as they dismounted, the sounds of their unsaddling. Graham's voice. In the background of his mind Adams wondered if Graham ever slept.

He lay listening in the silence, awake with the thoughts of Roan and the other seven men. Near him, the orderly Boyd had long since stopped trying to see to read and was sleeping against the tree. The paper-bound copy of Keats's *Hyperion* that he was always puzzling over was on the ground under his hand.

The amber beginnings of dawn sliced across the tethered horses and sleeping men, and Adams went down through the lightening trees and saw Lieutenant Graham sitting alone. The neat way he always looked, Adams told himself, you could never tell if he just got up or was awake all night. He came up behind the officer and sat down.

'They should be back.'

'They will be.'

Coming down towards him, Adams had believed he was thinking about the men he had sent back and in that moment had felt a vague sympathy for him. But he

wasn't, Adams thought now, he wasn't thinking of anything but probably the hellishly fine discipline he had put in his men.

Corporal Roan and his patrol came riding into the camp among the black pines; the rising morning mist off the river nearly hid the two supply wagons and the bulky wooden boats. They were tired, their eyes squinted red and dust-lined, but they stiffened their backs and rode in with almost a flourish.

The waking dragoons saw the boats and joked about them as they crowded around the returning patrol; but there was relief in their coarse laughter. They stood around, some with their boots in their hands, kidding Corporal Roan and the others.

Roan got off his horse and pushed through them to Lieutenant Graham and Adams. 'Take care of Savannah while I make my report,' he told one of the men, passing him the reins of his bay.

'We thought you decided to stay in Dalles,' Adams said. 'Where'd you go, by way of Californee?'

'That's like sarjints, criticizin' the ones that do the work. That war party we saw is gone, Lieutenant,' he said. 'We saw some stragglers comin' back.' Roan turned and looked round at the others behind him, grinning open-mouthed and satisfied. 'They won't be goin' back to help Kamiakin.'

Lieutenant Graham's soft brown eyes fixed strangely on Roan. 'You didn't attack them? Let them see you?'

'These here Yakimas ain't goin' to tell nobody what they saw, Lieutenant.' Roan half believed it would be all right if the lieutenant saw the rest of the company supported him. 'We got six out of eight of 'em.'

'Corporal, I gave you orders to hide your movement, make certain you were not picked up by their scouts. You've made sure they know we're here, maybe even our location.' Graham paused. 'Made our chances of getting through undetected a hundred times harder.'

Roan fingered his cartridge box as he stood there, the elation going out of him.

Graham's voice stayed orderly and controlled. 'Sergeant Adams,' he said, and didn't turn, 'make a note of this order. Corporal Roan is reduced this date to the grade of private soldier for failure to comply with his orders.'

Adams glanced at his friend and back to the crisply erect, slender Graham. He said gently, 'Lieutenant, these Injuns know this country along the Columbia. They probably know we're here.'

'Did you see any signal they did, Sergeant? Any sign at all?'

'No, sir.'

'Nor did I.'

He knew the lieutenant was right in this. Graham had moved them well and they had not seen any smoke or scouts and some of the best eyes in the company had looked for it. But he saw Roan again.

'Maybe they had already picked up Roan's men goin' up to Dalles.'

'This company moved this far without being seen. A non-commissioned officer should be able to do as well with a squad.'

'Lieutenant, maybe he was actin' under my orders,' Adams said.

'If that were true, Sergeant, I would have to operate this company without a senior sergeant. Did you make the note?'

Sergeant Adams stood beside his officer, consciously

weighing his seventeen years of service, knowing the lieutenant was right and yet fighting it because he didn't think Graham would even try to understand what had made Roan and his men attack the Yakimas. Adams, who had trained himself to ignore emotion, blamed Graham for having none. But he took some paper and a pencil from his pocket and wrote down the lieutenant's orders, then walked towards the wagons.

The company unloaded the two heavy boats and worked them along the landspit into the Columbia. They floated them behind the thick shielding undergrowth on the bank and tied them fast, hiding them where Graham directed. As they finished and Lieutenant Graham was telling Adams how the company would be divided in the boats, one of the dragoons rode in from the outpost and dismounted.

'Sighted an Injun, Lieutenant. He's some ways off; ain't doin' much outside of watchin'.'

Graham and Adams took their horses and followed the scout as they rode out along the line of trees. The soldier stopped them when they were about a quarter of a mile away from the camp and pointed towards a naked hill ridge that ran parallel to the river behind them. Graham and Adams scanned the ridge, seeing the lone horse and rider. They saw the rider get off and on two or three times, then run the horse around in small circles.

'What do you make of that, Sergeant?'

'Injun, all right. Ain't no white man, gettin' on and off the right side.'

'Running his pony around quickly like that means the same thing as one smoke, doesn't it?'

It surprised Adams that the young officer knew, 'Yes-sir. Regular danger signal. Probably means he's spotted our company and is tellin' the others.'

The soldier with them saw Lieutenant Graham's face and said, 'Lieutenant, we ain't been careless out here. Boyd and me did our best not to get seen.'

'It's all right,' Graham told him. 'It wasn't you. You and Boyd keep an eye on him; the main party should be along soon if we're right. Don't engage with them, but report in with the rest of the outpost. I think it's the same party we saw coming from Dalles.'

As they rode away from the scout, Adams watched Graham now and then, but did not say anything. When they drew near the camp he said, 'Lieutenant, Roan's a good man. Maybe he gets eager sometimes, but we all thought a heap of Captain Canby.'

'The army doesn't pay us to fight our individual wars, Sergeant.'

'You don't think like that out here, Lieutenant. Rememberin' like Roan and his men how many arrows they put in the captain. We found him afterwards, Lieutenant. After the fightin', when they got through.'

Graham stiffened but it was almost imperceptible, and riding beside him, Adams didn't notice it. 'We counted thirty-one arrows, Lieutenant. They put most of them in him after he was dead,' he said. 'Tore off his uniform; didn't even leave him at that.' He turned towards Lieutenant Graham. 'He was your brother officer; don't that mean nothin' to you?'

Lieutenant Graham looked at him as their horses almost stopped. 'I'm sorry that you seem to think it doesn't.'

Then he turned his horse under the fringe of trees and rode into the camp ahead of Adams.

They dismounted and the bugler took their horses. Graham looked around the area of the camp and glanced back towards where they had seen the Yakima scout.

'We'll have to leave the supply wagons and put the

pack saddles in the boats,' he told Sergeant Adams. 'We can use the wagons for barriers to stop them coming through the open clearing there. Put them across the middle and fill in with some heavy timber so they can't get in on their horses.'

Adams realized he was feeling something different about Graham without knowing what it was. *Ah, he thought, he's still the same little stiff-faced walking manual. Brand new jobn who thinks like the book thinks. All he knows.*

He got them started moving the two narrow-bed army wagons to block the clearing which was the only opening into their position among the close standing trees, and grassy hummocks coming up from the river bank. They loaded the supplies and ammunition in the boats and began cutting saplings and bundling them together across the space between the wagons and the beginning of the trees around the clearing. It was a good position. The company veterans gave that to the lieutenant. Their backs were protected by the wide river and the ground stretching away from the barricade along the front was smooth and fairly level without any holes or rocks the Indians could use for cover. And there was no heavy undergrowth or ravines near enough to let the Yakimas creep up for close shots. They would have to come across the open ground which spanned nearly three hundred yards from the barrier to the rising slopes of the ridge to the south.

On the left side of the position a natural hill turret climbed steeply thirty or forty feet above the edge of the river where the boats were concealed. It could be held with a few men, protecting their east flank. On the opposite side was the protection and concealment of the closely spaced pines through which the Yakimas would have to

come on foot. It was here that Graham put the bulk of the company, going around behind the barricade on the front, with six men on the hill turret where they could fire from the clefts of ported rock.

'We'll wait until dark before starting up-river,' he told Adams. 'It'll take seven or eight hours to reach Walla Walla and if we're not discovered by the main siege party, we should be past them before morning.'

'The company's ready. Everythin's loaded in the boats.'

The lieutenant looked down towards the boats where they were tied along the bank. 'I want them to swim their horses behind the boats. Horses don't like being pulled along in the water. They'll have to watch. It won't be easy. Some of them will lay over and quit swimming, or founder on the lines.'

'How you figger we can rest 'em?'

'Hardish says there are some islands along the shallow parts of the river between here and the Fort. We can get the horses out of the water on them and the men can rest, too. We'll make every effort to save our horses, Sergeant. Make sure they understand that.'

Adams, a man who had the ammonia smell of stables in his nose before he was seven, felt the kinship a horse-man feels for another. It came as it had that first day when Graham mentioned his horse's double load. Maybe all his thoughts didn't come out of books, Adams said to himself.

'Yessir, Lieutenant. The outpost patrol is comin' in soon's it's dark. If Owahi and his party don't drive 'em in before that.'

'You think it's Owahi?'

'Got to be. Him or Skloo, with Kamiakin himself up with the big party siegin' the Fort.'

The lieutenant paused, then asked, 'Wasn't Owahi the one who led the raid on the Cascades blockhouse?'

Adams's hands flexed. It wasn't unsureness that held his answer but remembering. 'Yessir,' he replied slowly. 'It was Owahi.'

Graham turned and regarded the clearing in front of the barricaded wagons and logs, a semicircle of open ground that was flanked by the hill turret and the trees on the other side, making a kind of salient towards them. In a minute or so, he looked back at Adams.

'I want twelve men with their horses ready to mount up on my signal. Have them place their horses back among the trees there, far enough from the edge of the clearing so they can't be seen,' he said. 'Pick the best sabres in the company, Sergeant. They may be the last ones out and have to go in the second boat.'

Adams's body prickled under the blue dragoon uniform; he ought to know Graham was going to be sure and go in the first boat after what happened with the war party.

'Goin' to be hard for 'em to get in the boats and get their horses in the water if we're under Injun attack,' he said.

'That's right. If it comes to that two or three of us will have to cover them while they get out. They can take our horses down with them and we can hold from that hill above the boats until they get moving up-river.'

Sergeant Adams realized the lieutenant intended being with the mounted men himself. Maybe this was a dragoon officer. Well, we'll get a good look when they come.

It was late afternoon when the outposts were driven in by the Yakimas. The patrol withdrew and came riding in singly along the river and dismounted outside the wooden barricade and led their horses in through the

trees. The soldier whom they had talked with earlier came over to Lieutenant Graham.

'Looks like the same party, Lieutenant. Seventy, eighty braves. Lot of 'em got Bay muskets.'

'How do you think they'll come the first time?' Graham asked Adams.

'They don't foller no pattern like Sioux or Pawnee. But they're still Injuns. Probably send a wave or two in to test us. They won't do much but duck back out when we start firin'.'

Lieutenant Graham thought a moment. 'Keep the boats upstream behind the bushes and the bluff of that hill. We have to keep them from being seen. Once we're around the bend in the river where it gets wider, we can keep more towards the far side.'

'Yessir, only's one thing, Lieutenant. Soon's this bunch runs on us and fights they'll probably hightail it up to Kamiakin and ask for more braves.'

Graham looked intently at Adams. 'I hope we make sure not very many get that opportunity.'

It was not phrased the way a Canby might have said it, but it was said with honesty. Adams smiled.

'Lieutenant, we aim to help you 'complish that.'

In the time they had left, the two of them moved around the company's perimeter, rearranging some of the men, talking to them, getting ready for the first riding wave of mountain Yakimas.

Suddenly the yelping cries of the Yakimas cracked through the black pines and the dragoons saw the leading riders pulled up on the hill across from them, their ponies milling about with the eagle feathers sticking in their manes and tails. The bright plumes and lances multiplied across the hill's crest until there were more than forty braves lined on it, their naked bodies and mountain

ponies painted and clayed with war signs, yelling insults across the intervening ground to the waiting company of soldiers.

'Bostons, come fight! Fight!' some of it came in missionary-taught English. 'You hear, long knives? Fight! Yellow-bellies! We show you our lance! It is all we say!'

'Ain't they brave, though,' Adams said to nobody, grinning away from his teeth, his own Indian-like eyes fired expectantly.

But the Black Bears of the Cascades were not new settlers. The First had a long history, and some knew Indians as well as Carson and had fought them longer. There was no foolish charge out of their position which would let the other half of the Indian party that had not shown itself come in on their flank and rear. It was an old trick and they looked at each other and laughed with its oldness.

The warriors along the hill line built themselves up with their screaming and yipping, the sounds growing louder as other Yakimas rode up behind the first ones and shook their shields and lances. Several of the younger braves rushed their ponies down the slopes and across the flat ground towards the clearing where the wagons were, only to wheel suddenly and return to the hill again.

'Don't mean nothin'. Youngsters, them,' Adam said. 'Showin' off for the others. They'll send down a wave directly.'

'Hold fire until they're in good shooting range,' Graham shouted along to the men, moving down a ways and returning. 'Volley fire with odds firing while evens reload. Save your pistols for any attack we can't stop.'

Sergeant Adams listened and grudgingly approved. It was a good system with the single-shot breechloaders. It

took a lot of white lives to find out the Indian's *real* charge came while you reloaded.

Then the beginning screaming wave came galloping down the sides of the hill and its ridges, their lances out and the war trappings fluttering in the wind's force, the ones with muskets carrying the balls for them in their mouths. As they neared the dragoons, coming now across the open ground, there was the explosive *chubs* of their bows and the booming sounds of the Hudson Bay rifles, their long barrels poking over the ponies' heads.

When the Yakimas were a shimmering colour line a few hundred feet from the clearing and the wagon barricade, the dragoons fired. The higher pitched Sharps crashed in volley, and the charging Indians ducked behind their ponies and turned hard, galloping back towards the hill crests. Behind them one or two horses neighed and rolled on the ground, riders dead beside them or running to the tree cover on the edge of the clearing.

Adams laid his carbine over the wagon bed and sighted one who had pulled himself from under a dying pony. The .58 calibre ball took the Yakima under the shoulder and spun him around at the close range; but after he fell Adams saw him still crawling for the trees. He reloaded and remembered the thirty-one arrows in the captain as he shot. The Indian rose up on his hand, as if to stand, then toppled over backward and lay still. Adams absently wet his thumb and ran it along the Sharps' stock.

Hardish fired from his place behind the wagon wheel and saw another fall past the running legs of his pony. Cackling, Hardish glanced at Adams and shouted, 'Come on, Sarjint, stop wastin' shots.'

'I'm just gettin' the range,' Adams yelled back.

The first charge over, Graham and Sergeant Adams moved along the line of soldiers. None of the company

had been hurt; they had killed three Yakimas in front of the position. They reloaded and waited the next assault.

It came like the first as Owahi put his fresh braves up and sent them down the hill again. But these spread as they crossed the open ground; and as the dragoons fired they swung around behind, their ponies in beautiful co-ordination and turned off again towards the hill. The subchief Owahi generalled well now, and sent another wave on an angle from the second, crossing behind the other retreating ponies. The suddenness of it caught some of the company; and one of the dragoons down from Adams sat cross-legged, his face twisted, saying 'Hunnh' as he began bleeding across his face.

Ex-Corporal Roan was next to him and pulled him over behind the meshed thickness where the saplings were tied together. Lieutenant Graham ducked along behind the barricade towards them.

'It ain't bad,' Roan said, 'but he's through fightin' here now.'

'Get him down to the boat.'

Childers helped Roan carry the man off, and Graham turned and looked over the barricade, holding the wounded man's carbine. The Yakimas were turning off, but still a fourth wave came slicing in behind them, and Graham aimed at one of the Indians slightly ahead of the others on his calicoed pony. A hundred hours of range practice and a hundred more of his own time shaped the nice lead Graham gave him, the pony's head almost touching the left frame of the sight. The Sharps banged on his shoulder and the Yakima slid over on the horse, clutched at its neck, then slipped off to the ground.

Roan and Childers came back and they knelt beside the lieutenant, firing almost together in their old soldier's

natural throw of their carbines, pulling the barrel down on the target instead of raising it. Graham saw the balls go home nicely, and as he reloaded he tried to tell them but in the noise they didn't hear him. Roan and Childers raced, stuffing the breech and closing, wanting another shot before the wave was beyond range.

It went that way for nearly an hour. The Yakimas yelped and screamed and rode down again and again with their ponies sometimes abreast and sometimes spread in a wide formation, with a flurry of arrows and musket fire. Then turned off and rode back to the hill again. But each time the leading edge of their assault reached closer to the barricade. One or two warriors even rode in, trying for the close work of their lance.

Graham and Adams hurried back and forth along the line behind the barricade and among the trees, moving a dragoon to cover when a man was carried down to the boats, then firing with the others as a new wave came. Suddenly it stopped.

Crouching down behind the wagons beside Adams, Graham said, 'Better have some more cartridges brought up from the boats. I don't think they've quit.'

Adams glanced up towards the hill where the remaining Yakimas were still arrayed. 'You're right, Lieutenant. They ain't through. I figger they're fixin' to have a pow-wow. Their assaults ain't no good with these wagons here and they can't get in close enough to use bows much.'

'You think they'll come on foot?'

'Likely. They lost ten, fifteen. And every brave has had his chance to show Owahi and the others he ain't afraid. They'll start usin' some new tricks to get at us.'

Squatting there with him, Adams realized the wagons and the position Graham planned were working out. To admit it came hard in the older Adams. He struggled

with it. He wanted to tell his officer and tried; but what came out was not what he really meant.

'Mighty good for us to have this position and the wagons,' he said.

Lieutenant Graham wanted this acceptance of the veteran sergeant, but could not show it openly. He leaned down on his carbine. 'I'm going to get the others mounted up back there in the trees.'

'What're you figgerin' on doin', Lieutenant?'

'See if they have any flanks, Sergeant.' His smile was restrained as he walked off towards the woods.

THE YAKIMAS disappeared from the crest above them. Owahi had seen nearly a quarter of his braves killed and wounded under the stoic hand signal he gave. He had sat his fleet Marmolete on the hill and sent them down on the pony soldiers and waited for the coup—the precise moment when he would lead all his warriors in on the long knives and spear them as they had hooked salmon from the Columbia before these whites came. He saw some of his best die. It was enough, he said, and they rode to council, leaving the crest bare and empty.

In their hatred they adopted a part of the white man's tactics. The dragoons saw them infiltrating down in bands several places along the hill and forming a ragged line as they reached its base. The line moved across the level ground in rising and falling segments as the Yakimas ran a few steps, then dropped and crawled, hard targets low against the ground.

Adams had the men along the barricade while Graham was in the woods where the horsemen were. He called to them, chopping his big hand on the breech of his Sharps to hold fire. The discipline of the Indians was a strange thing because it was unnatural; they held to it and came on, rising, flashing, bounding figures, then prone. Adams watched them unbelievably as they came now, without a word or a scream or a cry. A couple of dragoons along the barricade laughed nervously.

They felt the logic of Owahi working on them, their throats pulsing to yell and curse, to get the Yakimas shout-

ing again. In those few minutes until they would engage it was an odd mental battle. The discipline of the dragoons, ingrained and bred by profession; the unnatural restraint of the Indians, born in desperate hate and a belief in the justice of their war.

When they were a twisted uneven line of humped forms and skirmishers about a hundred and fifty yards away, the Yakimas rose up and came whooping and yelling towards the wagons which had blocked their earlier results. The abrupt noise startled the dragoons and their dry, tense throats reacted; they were shouting without knowing it as they began firing.

The sounds of the Sharps reverberated off the trees and the hill, mixing with the sporadic fire of the Indians' heavy Hudson Bay rifles. Two men of the company were hit and some of the Yakimas dropped in the steady aimed fire from the barricade. But the running, bounding figures kept on. Adams and Roan, next to each other, were alternating loading and firing. Hardish and the bugler lay behind the wagon wheel, their cartridge boxes between them. Childers was farther down along the barricade and he shot and rolled back on his elbow and reloaded in a style he had learned in his old regiment, fighting among the Florida swamps.

'Crank up, Sarjint!' Roan yelled in glee. 'This's just like ducks goin' off the water!'

Adams's face was strained, but he grinned. 'Do more shootin' and less talkin'! They ain't stopped so's you can notice yet.'

Thirty or forty yards away from the barricade the company broke the running charge. But behind them Owahi brought another and the first reassembled with them and came on again.

A runner came up beside Sergeant Adams and stooped

beside the big non-commissioned officer as he was reloading. 'Lieutenant says not to drive 'em off.'

'Is he out of his mind?'

'Didn't say, Sarjint; jús told me to tell you not to drive 'em off.'

Adams looked at the Yakimas and fired once, then dropped on his knee and shook his head at the runner. 'All right, I'll close off some fire. You sure he said that?' He grabbed the other's jacket.

'Sure, I told you.' The runner glanced towards the trees where the lieutenant and the other riders were. 'There he is,' he said. 'His signal.' The runner moved past Adams and motioned to the bugler.

The bugler rolled over on his side and crouched, blowing the charge. The Yakimas rose and the whole war party ran towards the company of dragoons. Their yelps and whoops and the clatter of their lances beating on the shields nearly smothered Adams's command.

'Use your pistols!' he shouted after the bugle blew.

As he drew his own he saw Lieutenant Graham and the mounted men burst from the edge of the trees, galloping in behind and to the side of the Yakimas. They drove across the clearing in a tight bunched charge and rode in among the Indians with the heavy Prussian sabres.

Leading them, Graham wheeled his grey and stood from the stirrups, then in a wild dervishing kind of horsed motion, chopped and cut from both sides of his grey. A small madman, the little officer swung and cut down one Indian and whirled his horse on another, a symmetry of slashing precision of the sword.

'My God, look at him!' Hardish yelled. 'Look at Gloves!'

It was the brilliant execution of the dragoon on sabre charge and Adams forgot who it was or anything else.

'Give 'em hell, Lieutenant! Ride off their stinkin' heads!' Then he shouted, 'Let's go!' and vaulted the barricade, waving his long Colt. The other dragoons jumped over the logs and wagons after him.

They closed with the Yakimas and it became a swirling melee of horses and riders and blue-coated and naked men killing to keep from being killed, fighting with the knife and the lance and the bow and the pistol and the sabre and the hands.

Owahi, his war bonnet hanging behind him below his waist, tried to rally his Yakimas. He lanced one of the dragoons from his horse and sprang on it himself, without stirrups, kneeling the animal around. He rode in on Boyd, who had been with the dragoons who charged with the lieutenant, and as Boyd slashed Owahi caught the sabre blow on his lance. Still holding it with his hands widespread, he turned it over and plunged it in Boyd's throat and the dragoon fell from his horse, carrying the hooked lance with him. Like Keats, whose poem he had been trying to understand, Boyd died before ever having the chance to write of the real things he knew about.

On the ground near them, Hardish laid his pistol on his arm and aimed on the Yakima chief. Fifteen yards away, a brave thumbed an arrow to his bow, the blade perpendicular to the notch for the string as the arrow is set, to pass between the horizontal ribs of the human. The bow drummed its elk string and the arrow thunked through Hardish's sword belt in front and came out behind. He stood, surprise on his face, then fell down on his knees and rolled on his side, still holding his unfired revolver. Seeing him fall, Adams aimed his pistol and shot the bowman in the stomach.

Lieutenant Graham stopped his horse as he saw Boyd

and Hardish on the ground. He jumped down from the saddle and motioned to two of the dragoons.

'Hurry, get them down to the boat. Careful with Hardish. The arrow is through him.'

He paused, looking at the dead orderly, then bounded back on his horse and was turning towards the ground fighting when Owahi saw the officer insignia. He bare-kneed the captured army horse on a run at Graham, carrying a second lance.

'Lieutenant! Look out!' Adams yelled, fumbling cartridges into his revolver.

Graham swivelled away from Owahi's lance thrust and tried to bring his sabre down, but from the awkward position of swinging it flat away from his elbow, he missed. Owahi bitted his horse down hard, swinging around to come on him again with the lance. Lieutenant Graham stood in his stirrups as Owahi passed and the blunt sabre travelled those few feet as he threw it, with his strength and the momentum of his moving horse. The point set itself through the soft, hanging eagle feathers of Owahi's bonnet, going in through kidney and beyond. Owahi leaned back slackly, his fingers slipping across the short-clipped mane of the dragoon horse as he sat there momentarily. He began doubling forward and tried to raise his lance up over his knees, then looked at Graham and slumped deeper, running off the saddle slowly and by degrees. He fell face down on the ground. His knees doubled under him convulsively, and the handle-weight of the sabre made it fall to one side, hanging as a *banderilla* from the neck of a bull.

Some of the Yakimas had secured their ponies and rode in, seeing their chief die. Two of them broke forward with their lances on Graham to avenge Owahi's death. Adams shot offhand and missed the leading rider but

struck the pony in the neck and it reared, throwing the Yakima. Roan, his bay lathered and wet, turned and rode beside the second Italian and sabred him from the running pony.

Mulaney, the bugler, pulled another from his horse, and parrying the brave's lance with his carbine stock, he swung it by the barrel and caught the Yakima in the neck. Mulaney turned to chortle at Adams, and a ball from one of the big Hudson Bay muskets struck him in the left eye. His hands flew up to his face and he ran a few steps and died.

Sergeant Adams hurried towards him as Roan shielded them both with his horse. But as Adams and Childers, who had also run up, grabbed the legs and shoulders of the bugler, an arrow struck Roan high and just ahead of his ear and he fell from his horse. Sergeant Adams and Childers knelt beside Roan and the dead bugler, with their hand guns holding off the Yakimas' efforts to mutilate their two companions.

Lieutenant Graham saw the war party's rally and signalled the seven dragoons who were still mounted. They disengaged and aligned their horses on the far side of the clearing, eight of them abreast. Sabreless, Graham raised his revolver and they charged the reassembling Yakimas. As they rode in with sabres, and some using their pistols, the re-forming Indians broke and their ponies began scattering as they wheeled and retreated towards the slopes of the hill. The braves who were on foot tried to follow, stopping to shoot as they ran; but the dragoons rode them down and only ten or more reached the slopes.

It was over. Bodies of dragoon and red man lay in the sudden silence of the clearing.

Graham moved the remaining dragoons back to their position behind the barricade of wagons and tree boles

and they assembled, helping those who were wounded. Sergeant Adams walked around among them, sending the ones who were badly hurt to the boats. A dragoon opened the barricade, and the lieutenant and the others led their horses through.

He gave his horse to a soldier and stopped by Adams. The sergeant had just sent the wounded Roan and the dead bugler down to the boats, carried by the other men. He picked up Mulaney's bugle, looked at it, then looked after the dragoons carrying him.

'How do we stand?' Graham asked.

'Seven killed, Lieutenant. Eight or nine wounded, Roan and Hardish pretty bad.'

'Boyd's dead?'

'Yessir.'

The lieutenant finished reloading the Colt and holstered it. Then he looked out where the Yakimas lay around the cleared area in front of the barricade, one or two sprawled across the barricade itself. During the fighting the Yakimas had carried many of their party back and it was hard to know how many had been killed. The whole area was shadowing, dimmed by the setting sun behind the Cascades.

'What do you think of their casualties?' Graham said.

'Figger they got no more than thirty effective left,' Adams said. 'Maybe less. But they'll come for their chief. They have to.'

'Yes. They'll come for their chief,' Graham echoed.

He unconsciously touched the handle of his recovered sabre, thinking of Trew. He looked at the dead Owahi. And he thought of the men it took to put him there, doubled up as he was, a motionless inert body, no longer anything.

When Graham turned back to Adams, it was with the

mechanical face again. 'If they come against our fifteen, some of them wounded, we'll lose more men than the Fort needs.'

Adams turned over the bugle he was holding, half seeing the name scratched on it, and he thought of the map paper that had fallen from inside the orderly's jacket as they were carrying him around behind the rocky bluff where they were burying the others. *His thinking ain't changed; E. S. Graham is only worried because he can't deliver the whole company.*

'We'll be pretty good targets in the boats with it still light,' he told Graham.

'I know.'

'Injuns are funny, Lieutenant, how they believe so holylike in medicine. Specially these Yakimas. They've lost their chief and think we're bad medicine for 'em. It don't mean they're afraid. All's they'll be wantin' is Owahi's body.'

'I meant their reinforcing with a hundred or so from the main party. It's what we would do. Sergeant.'

'They won't go near Kamiakin and the rest of 'em. They won't go around the tribe for a long time after losin' their chief. Owahi's next to Kamiakin hisself. It's a lot of face and honour with an Injun.'

Graham weighed the two: his confidence in Adams against the risk. 'All right, Sergeant. We'll wait. You get the hackamore lines on the boats and the men ready; I'll do what I can for the wounded.'

Lieutenant Graham walked down to the river and around behind the hill turret. He saw the seven bodies and went past the two dragoons who were digging. The dragoons were wrapped in the blankets from their horses, and Graham stood beside them and said something he remembered from the cadet chapel. It wasn't a prayer for

this, but it was all he knew. Somehow it seemed too brief for what had happened to these men and so he said the Lord's Prayer too. Then he put his hat on and went over to the boats.

They had made blanket pallets in the first boat for Hardish and Roan. He climbed into the boat and saw Roan lying on his side, covered with another blanket which was drawn up around his chin. Next to him was Hardish. They had removed the arrow and there was little else that could be done until they reached the surgeon at Walla Walla. The corners of his mouth moved as he recognized Graham.

The lieutenant took the bottle of whisky he had brought and gave Hardish some. 'We'll be at the Fort pretty quick,' he told him. 'You'll be all right.'

The scout's glance met his and Graham thought, *We both know I'm lying. You knew when I gave you whisky with a stomach wound. We won't be at the Fort pretty quick and the arrow went through your lower stomach and God knows how many other things inside you.*

Hardish said something, but it was too low to be heard and he leaned down near him. 'You're a-right, 'tenant. Reg'lar heller. Saw you. Killed tha' damn 'Wahi, huh?'

'Don't talk,' Graham said and looked at the damp bandage around Hardish's stomach. One of the dragoons gave him clean ones and he changed it. Hardish was staring off, his head turned down on his neck. 'Thanks,' he said sightlessly, 'thanks.'

Lieutenant Graham moved to Roan and pulled the blanket down. He was semi-conscious. The obsidian-stone war blade of the arrow was wedged in the bone over his ear. The blade had fishhook-like barbs in either side, digging into the bone.

'It's still there,' the one helping him said.

'Yes. But he's still alive. Lord knows how, but he's alive,' Graham said.

He took his knife and spilled some whisky on it, then tried gently to pry around the arrowhead. Roan writhed and the other dragoon put his weight on his shoulders to hold him.

After ten minutes Lieutenant Graham's forehead and hands were sweaty. He stopped and sat there on the backs of his legs, feeling helpless, unable to do anything more. The knife was useless in getting the arrowhead out and there was not enough of it for a fingerhold.

Sam Beard came from the rear of the boat and squatted down, his right arm bandaged. 'I take him out,' he said solemnly.

'How?' Graham asked. 'How can you, Sam? I'm afraid to try any more with the knife and there's no way to grip it, to get hold of it.'

The big Chocktaw showed his teeth, biting with them. The lieutenant looked back at Roan breathing noisily, at the place along his skull bone where the arrowhead was. He moved back a little and nodded to Beard.

Graham watched Beard get down on his knees beside Roan, then helped the other soldier hold the southerner as Sam took Roan's head under his good hand and tried to get the end of the blade between his teeth. Roan twisted, groaned. Sam tried two or three times while Graham and the other dragoon held him. Once again, he leaned over Roan and set his teeth around the arrowhead. Roan jerked up and screamed; Beard rose away from him, his face smiling around the short piece of obsidian he held in his teeth.

Graham put some of the whisky in Roan's mouth, dribbling it over his lips, and then looked at the wound. It was triangular shaped, in the bone and not bleeding very

much. He washed it as well as he could from the water canteen and after swabbing it with raw whisky, bandaged it. He stood up as the other dragoon covered Roan.

'Keep some wet bandages on his head,' Graham said. 'If he wakes up again try to get him to take some of this. It'll help the pain a little.' He handed the soldier the bottle of whisky. He turned towards Beard. 'I don't know how you did it, Sam. Thanks.'

'Mebbe not always bad be part Injun.'

'You're right. It's good, Sam. It's very good.'

'You make him corp'rul. He good man. Big rider. Plenty brave.'

He had seen Roan killing one of the Yakimas to protect him during the fighting and instinctively wanted to tell the Chocktaw yes. But it was a separate thing, his reducing Roan. He could not equate the dead dragoons with his own gratitude, or Roan's wound.

'I'm sorry, Sam. I can't.'

While he moved around the boat looking at the other wounded, the rest of the company began wading their horses out belly-deep in the river, bringing them along the bank behind the boats. They kept them where it was shallow enough to stand and passed the lead ropes from the boats and hooked them through the halter rings on the bridles. Adams walked out in the water and watched, making sure they left the horses swimming room but kept the ropes short enough to help keep them from lying over deliberately or foundering.

'Come on, get that chestnut critter up there with the others,' he told a dragoon. 'Keep some slack in them ropes! You want to tear his mouth off?'

The horses did not like the restraint of the hackamore ropes on them in the water and some thrashed about and reared, neighing and throwing one or two soldiers in the

river. Roan's bay was jerking and splashing as one of the dragoons tried to fasten the trail line across, and the rope fell in the water, spearing and eddying with the current. The dragoon looked at Adams on the bank and scowled.

'Talk to him like a southern boy,' Adams said. 'He ain't used to Yankees.'

The other dragoons, working in the beginning darkness with the horses, laughed. It was coming back, the thing called morale or *esprit* that the men felt when they sensed their officers belonged to them and not the other way around. And even in their gamble, going upriver past the hundreds of Yakimas and Klickitats with their small number, they stood with their buttocks and thighs wet in the river and were happy being what they were.

Night had settled on the river when Lieutenant Graham finished and climbed from the boat and found Sergeant Adams. He was standing along the bank, his blue pants with their orange stripe sticking damply to his long heavy legs, the Colt and sword belt hanging over his shoulder. He stepped out to his knees in the river. 'Get them stirrups up and tied,' he told one of the men. 'Goin' to be hard enough for them without extra problems.'

The horses stood along the shallows near the edge of the bank, curving out a little in the river, quieter now and getting used to the water and current running around their forelegs and chests. The rowing shifts were setting their oars while the rest of the company helped straighten the lead lines from the boats.

Sergeant Adams came back on the bank beside Graham, and the runner he had sent returned with the dragoons who had been guarding the barricade. One of them was carrying something.

'What's that?' Graham asked.

'Owahi's war bonnet, Lieutenant. We took it 'fore they started comin' down for their dead.'

Adams's and the other men's faces were indistinct and Graham could not see them very well. Adams said, 'I told him to get it, Lieutenant. It's yours.'

Lieutenant Graham was embarrassed. 'Put it in the boat,' he said.

He watched the three soldiers as they walked away and Adams moved beside him in the dark. 'I guess we're ready, Lieutenant.'

'I'll go in the boat with the wounded,' Graham said. 'You take the other and keep towards the far side as much as you can. The current is stronger in the middle; try to keep out of it.'

'There ain't much along the river where we pass 'em but a few patches of willows, Lieutenant. Gets pretty open from here until we hit the ford near Walla Walla. We'll have to keep a sharp look.'

Graham considered his plan, aware of what it meant if some stray Yakima discovered them crowded in the boats. The war camps stretched two or three miles, maybe even more now. There would be small chance with the wounded and their horses. But his mission was unchanged, and for him that settled any doubts.

'If we're seen and attacked, get your men in the water behind the boats,' he told Adams. 'We'll have to let them drift with the current, abandon the horses if it comes to that.'

'Yessir.' Sergeant Adams paused and smiled humourlessly but the officer couldn't see it. 'There's one thing, Lieutenant.'

'What is that?'

'They can't see no better'n us at night.'

Graham looked at his tall sergeant, the pistol and sabre

and cartridge box still hanging around his neck to keep it dry. The bulk was reassuring. He laughed. 'I guess you're right there.'

As they started towards the boats Adams swung towards him briefly. 'Good luck, Lieutenant,' he said.

'Thanks. Good luck to you.'

8

THEY LOOSED the boats and pushed them out in the swift-running Columbia and started past Kamiakin and his siege party. The boats sat deep in the water and the current bore against the wide bows and fantailed behind; the river was covered with the silvery scallops of the heads of the swimming horses.

Four men rowed while another dragoon handled the low outboard rudder in the stern, trying to keep from fouling the hackamore ropes going back to the horses. The Columbia was strong and fast as they angled towards the middle and they moved slowly; now and then a horse blew wetly as the line tightened and pulled his jaws too deep in the water.

After nearly a half hour they had gone only three quarters of a mile upstream towards the Fort. The rowing dragoons were getting the concerted pull but the horses had spread on the ropes and swam more evenly, their sinewy legs and chests moving in the rhythmic endurance of solid cavalry stock.

The heavy bateaus and their fans of trailing horses approached where the river curved around to the south, where they would start passing the outskirts of the Indian war camps. Some of the men holding ropes to the horses wound them around the boat pins and unslung their carbines. They checked the breeches and cocking, then laid the large-bored Sharps over the edge of the boats and knelt along the sides.

Graham tensed inside as they rounded the beginning

bend of the Columbia feeling the responsibility for their lives. The plan had seemed good back there in the abstraction of the land camp; here on the river, nearing the Yakimas, he realized there would hardly be a probability of any of them escaping if they were discovered. Graham, perhaps in this way like his stepbrother, never thought in terms of dying. What Graham felt was the latent and dawning awareness that comes to the new officer in first combat, when he has seen men in his charge die under his commands, when the meaning of a decision is taken from the routine of camp and put in the context of war. He looked around at his men in the boat, and suddenly felt like an old man.

Behind them in the second boat Sergeant Adams sat in the flat-seated bow, hunched and motionless, his dark, thrusting eyes watching the overlapping bushes along the bank. The dragoons with him cradled their guns with the fresh loads, squinting and trying to pierce the closure of night.

'Like lookin' in a barrel,' one of them said softly.

'You keep thinkin' maybe they're out there somewhere's, behind them bushes, waitin', lettin' us get far 'nough up,' another answered.

The river widened going through the Gap, spreading another fifty yards or more, but shallower and forcing them to go against the centring current. Their stinging eyes stung from watching everything and seeing nothing.

As the river bore straight again they saw the far-off fires of the Yakimas and the Klickitats. Under the steady pace of their rowing the boats began moving parallel to them and the red cancers of the first fires grew on the sky and the ground line. The occasional talking stopped. Now there were only the chumping sounds of the oars

and their blades swishing in the water, the noises from the horses.

Hardish and some of the other wounded lay in the bottom of the first boat, staring up from their pallets at the contour of the black sky. Both Roan and he were still alive. A dragoon dipped cloths in the river and wet their foreheads and Hardish lay quiet and unmoving, conscious, the whole pain spread in his body and no longer localized in his stomach and back. His broad bone of a chin bunched against any sounds from him that would warn the Indians.

Roan was delirious and thrashed in the blankets. Sam Beard sat beside him on the boat's edge and when he thought Roan was going to moan, the Chocktaw put his hand over the southerner's mouth and nose, smothering him. It was efficient.

They made another mile upstream. But now that they were opposite the scrabbled Indian fires which appeared much closer than they were, the two boatloads of dragoons sat even more tautly alert. Their sweat moistened the metal of the guns in their hands. And as they waited for any sign of discovery the hooding, clouded sky splintered away from the moon. The lightness spread around them, smooth and glossy and unwelcome on the wide river and going up and illuminating dimly the lower reaches of the mountains.

The abruptness caused a soft curse; the voice trailed off quickly.

The moonlight gave a pale visibility to objects against the sky and it helped that the Cascades' ranging heights were to the west and behind them. Here and there they saw the climbing twists of fire smoke and indistinct far-off outlines where the Indian camps were.

They followed a break in the river and Graham turned,

signalling to stop their rowing. Some two or three hundred yards ahead, along the edge of the river there was a flash of brown and white. He let their boat drift backward, having them pull towards the bank. Adams saw his arm signal and moved his boat crosscurrent behind the other.

As they grounded lightly, Sergeant Adams climbed over and waded up beside the other boat. Graham got out in the water.

'What is it, Lieutenant?' Adams asked, his words barely audible.

'I'm not sure. Seemed like an Indian pony. Maybe more than one.'

Adams looked at the two boats and the horses, some able to stand and the rest pulling on their lines and trying to get in beside them.

'We can't stay like this long, Lieutenant. Either have to bring 'em all in or go on up and take our chances. Them horses will be goin' crazy in a minute.'

'Get five men and we'll try to go up behind whatever I saw. One shot might bring the whole camp. We'll send the boats on; they can pick us up farther up-river. Leave your sabres,' he said, unhooking his and handing it in the boat.

Sergeant Adams picked some dragoons and they dropped quietly in the river and followed him up to where Graham waited. They watched the boats move out into the current again.

'We'll have to move fast if there's anyone up there,' Lieutenant Graham told them. 'Take them before they have a chance to see the boats and the others.'

Childers was among those Adams had taken from the boat and he asked, 'What do you think it is, Lieutenant?'

'Indian horses. If it is their owners are near by. Either sentries or just camped by the river.'

'No shootin',' Adams told the dragoons. 'Use knives.'

They started out together in half crouches as they worked diagonally away from the bank until they were about a hundred yards from its edge. Then they turned and paralleled the river's course, fanning out in a patrol comb along the upper bank.

Graham stopped them. 'I think they should be somewhere along here,' he whispered.

The seven of them crept forward slowly, Indian fashion, setting their feet flatly before putting weight on them, the three who had drawn their knives carrying them palmed against their hands. They heard the blowing of a horse ahead. Man sounds. The breaking of sticks; a voice answering another.

Advancing in a semicircle towards the Indians, low silhouettes, they saw the small field *caballada* of ponies tethered together. Adams counted the dark shapes. Four. And as they moved nearer he saw the Yakima's back, the one building the fire. *Where were the other three?*

He touched Graham, holding up four fingers. The lieutenant nodded, spread his hand towards the other dragoons. They dropped silently on the ground and stayed motionless; one of the ponies looked in their direction and his ears moved forward.

Adams saw it. The notches the Yakima cuts in his pony's ears for ownership moved as the animal shifted them back and forth questioningly. *Where were the other three braves?* They had to take them all at once, and soon. Before the one buck got the fire going or the inquisitive pony nickered to them. He regripped the knife and moved around to the right with the lieutenant, trying to locate the other three Yakimas.

Just as they decided to take the chance on the one warrior, the others came up from the river, two of them

carrying water and the third with pieces of dried wood for the fire. And in the incidental noises of their coming the dragoons crept closer.

They lay still, watching their officer. As Graham raised his hand, they drew their legs under them and poised themselves.

'Now!' he hissed, and they sprang up and Adams bladed his knife on the fire-builder who never saw the face of the man who killed him. The Yakima with the wood dropped it quickly and pawed for his own knife, jumping aside as one of the dragoons swung down with his clubbed revolver.

It was the body-and-fist fighting Adams loved and he hurtled over the one he had killed and came on the side of the brave with the knife. The Yakima lunged out and brought it in a trained arc at Adams's stomach; but the sergeant moved with surprising quickness and snatched up a stick of the firewood and struck the other's knife arm. He held his own knife straight out with no fancy slash and put it through the Yakima's breastbone, his two hundred and twenty pounds in the wrenched thrust.

While he fought, one of the other Yakimas threw the wooden bowl he was holding, stepped away from the dragoons and backed onto the knife of Childers behind him. He swivelled, standing in his shock, and Childers pushed him off the blade and watched him stagger and fall across the pyramided sticks of the unlighted fire. Childers turned to where Graham was fighting the last Yakima.

Lieutenant Graham evaded the warrior's knife and knocked him down with the Colt's long horse-barrel, holding the round loading-cylinder tight in his hand and hitting the Indian at the base of his neck. The short struggle had lasted three minutes.

'We'd better move out fast, Lieutenant,' Adams said. 'The boats should be comin' along soon. And I guess they'll be missin' these braves before long.'

The Indian Graham had knocked down now stirred on the ground, starting to rise suddenly, then getting up very slowly and watching them with slitted, careful eyes. He raised his arms halfway to his shoulders.

'Kill him,' Adams told one of the men.

'No, you can't murder him,' Graham said. 'He's surrendering.'

'He ain't surrenderin', Lieutenant. You can't use no rules with them.'

'He is a prisoner, entitled to the rights of prisoners. Tie him and bring him down to the boats.'

Adams understood the civilized schooling of young Graham; he knew it was what Graham would do. Another war, another time, it had a place. But not in this one, not now, he told himself. No more.

'We'll take him if you say so, Lieutenant. But this Injun knows he's better off dead as to go back to his people now. He's goin' to give the alarm 'bout us somehow, if he gets killed doin' it.'

'I don't doubt you're right,' the lieutenant answered. 'But if you qualify regulations you don't have any. We're here to try to stop war, not to give them every reason to keep fighting us.'

Sergeant Adams agreed with him on that. *Only we got different ways of how it ought to be done*, he thought.

'You and Childers tie up the Indian and bring him down. We'd better go on down and signal the boats,' Graham said.

The lieutenant and the other dragoons left for the river. Adams motioned to the Indian ponies which were bridled with head harnesses of twisted hempen grass.

'Cut some rope off one of 'em,' he told Childers.

Childers stood still. He had a fixed grin on his face, his fatty brows drawn up from his small crescents of eyes as he stared at Adams. He did not move for the rope. They heard the faint splashing in the river below them as the others waded out to signal the boats.

'Come on, let's get out of here, Childers. We ain't got all day.'

The private began laughing. Not loudly or with any real noise at all, only a series of puffing sounds going in his mouth like a dog panting.

'You mean *you* ain't,' Childers said.

Sergeant Adams shifted his glance from the Yakima. Childers was holding his knife out in front of him, away from his body and his thumb along the back part, feeling the blood on it from the Indian.

'The company needs us. Both of us, Childers. This ain't the place.'

'Yes, it is. This's the exact place. 'Cause there's no way for you to get away this time, Adams; 'cause there ain't no way in God's world for you to get out of it, Adams.'

'Don't be a damn fool.' He was trying to watch both Childers and the Yakima and not wanting to kill Childers or even feeling any reason for fighting him. 'We can settle our fuss after we get out of this. What good us killin' one another, with *him* gettin' away?'

'He's part of it,' Childers said, and looked at the Yakima who understood not a word they were saying. 'The buck's part of it,' he told Adams again, advancing with the knife. 'If you get me, he kills you. You see why it's the place all right, Adams? You're dead right now.'

'You're crazy. What makes you think he won't grab one of them knives on the ground and go for you when you jump me?'

'I still get you, Adams. The Injun's the only one what gets away,' Childers said, his eyes fevered-looking as he moved with his fet spread and holding the knife low and the blade turned out.

Adams listened and tried to stall him, knowing it was useless. 'How's anybody goin' to know, Childers, when neither one of us gets to the boats? Who's goin' to know?' 'Me.'

He was only a few feet away and lunged and Adams did not try to grab his knife arm, but twisted sideward behind the Indian, trying to watch them both. Childers kept grinning and moved towards him again.

As he backed up a little Childers moved fast, his hands out, the one with the knife behind the other, and Adams evaded the quick slash. He gripped his own knife. Childers was between him and the Indian and Adams saw the Yakima snatch up one of the knives dropped in the fighting and come up behind Childers.

'Childers! The Injun!'

But Childers was oblivious of anything except Adams, and when Adams tried to leap past him after the Yakima, Childers thought it was a thrust at him and brought his knife up and sliced the sergeant's forearm. The Indian jammed his knife in Childers and the private arched backward suddenly, reaching back for it. As he twisted over and fell, Adams was on the Yakima and put the knife into his side and as he struggled with him, he stabbed the warrior again under the ribs, pushing it in and in. The Yakima fell across part of Childers's body.

Adams pulled him off and turned Childers over carefully, holding him up and seeing the blood running out of his mouth. He coughed and Adams took his bandanna and wiped his mouth, held it against his lips. The private pushed it away and coughed again. He wheezed, cough-

ing, and closed his eyes; then opened them again. His lungs were flooding, and the blood coursed up. Childers retched and coughed, swallowing, drowning in his wound. Adams tried to wipe his mouth and he pushed the bandanna away weakly.

Childers quieted, his eyes lucid again. 'Never figured,' he mumbled, and coughed and shook with a chill and his head rolled back on Adams's arm. Childers was dead. Adams stared at him. *The damn complete uselessness*, he thought. *The whole damn stupidity of it.*

He remembered the boats. He rose and looked at the Yakima and Childers. He tied the bandanna around his arm where Childers had cut him; then slid his hands under the private and got him half sitting, swung one of his arms over his head, picked him up and started down to the river.

Adams saw the boats dimly on the water and waded out a few feet. Someone whispered to hurry. Adams sloshed closer to the boat carrying Childers.

'What happened?' Graham asked when Adams was close enough to see him.

Adams looked at him in the night. 'The Injun tried to take us both and knifed Childers.'

'Here, some of you, help Adams with him.' A couple of men began lifting Childers into the boat and Graham started moving towards him.

'He's dead, Lieutenant,' Adams said, and as the officer stopped, he splashed off in the water towards the second boat and disappeared darkly over its edge.

The boats bore slowly against the current, going cross-stream, the water slapping along the wide-angled bows. The men sat motionless except for the rowers as they moved past the endless war camps and fires which seemed always to be beside them, moving as the moon moved,

apace with the boats. The ambushed Yakima sentries, some thought. It had to be done, but it would not go long without discovery in a war party.

Behind them the tiring horses dragged on the lines. One foundered and his flat weight planed against the river surface and had to be cut loose. The rider did it with open feeling. A dragoon's horse was part of his life, and he did not lose his animal without showing it.

The shifting clouds brought the relief of dark night to the river again. Another mile. They were more than half-way past the Indian camps but the hardest remained. Even changing in shifts they were beginning to feel the steady rowing of the loaded boats and the added, dragging pull of the horses. Back in his boat, Adams studied the murky edges of the river where it met the ground mass. It was crazy, he thought. Twenty-two of them, twenty-one now, with their wounded, trying to sneak past probably more than a thousand Yakimas and Klicks. The little officer wanted a miracle.

They turned in a gentle bend and ahead of them was a narrow sandy island. Graham pointed them in to it, grounding the boats lightly out of the channel.

The horses were led up to rest, foreleg-deep on the edges of the island; and Sergeant Adams came up to the boat where Roan was.

'How is he, Lieutenant?'

Graham covered Roan with the blanket and straightened. 'He's sleeping. Seems to be resting better. I can't see how he has lived, his head torn that way. I wish there was more I could do to stop any infection.'

'Hardish?'

Lieutenant Graham hesitated in the darkness, then motioned towards the back of the boat where 'Hardish's body was wrapped in the service blanket beside the dead

Childers. He wanted to say something to Adams, and it was hard to keep to himself what he felt. Sergeant Adams walked off to the other boat, wondering if Graham knew nine of his men were dead.

After they rested awhile on the thin river island, Graham sent a runner around and they loaded in the boats, shoving them out in the channel. As his boat pulled ahead of the other, Graham held the carbine across his legs and looked back at the boat with Adams. He had been with them a long time, he thought. *You could have said something. It's what Angela meant. Have I machined my thinking and beliefs so much that I seem cold to her too?*

Maybe she was right, he thought. *Maybe some of them do think I don't feel anything and hate me for it. But how much would it help them, or how much would they respect me if I showed what it meant every time one of them was hurt or killed?* His face was a vague dimness as he turned back from the other boat. If you slacken your own discipline, your own control, you reduce your right to command. And believing it, he leaned over the gunwale and put his mind to watching the river bank again.

The current lessened and they approached the levelling river bed that ran another eight miles to the Fort, then broke upwards to the north, to the swift source streams of the Wenatchee and the Yakima that coursed down from the mountains. The Indian fires were drawing away, their scattered mass going slowly behind them. But the dragoons stayed tense and watchful. They were deep in the Walla Walla's country. A hundred of Kamiakin's warriors could have ridden their ponies far ahead along the river and planned their ambush.

Two more miles. The boatloads of men found a second island and rested, then pushed the boats out and went on. The horses had stood with their heads down, water run-

ning from their necks and heads, and it had been hard to get them in the stream again.

An hour nearer morning, the company passed the main camps and could no longer see the fire glows. When they were not on turn rowing, the dragoons sat listless in the boats, struggling against the sleep they wanted, bodies tired and eyes itching from the strain of continuous watching. The dawn mists steamed off the Columbia's surface as day came. And the revealing light brought them up taut again in the boats.

THE AVENUE of brownness and the patches of green receded from the sides of the river, climbing through the expanse of tree line and foliage on the left towards the mountains, whose lumped shadows and snow-peaks now took the early sun across the great sponges of pines near their high summits. The boats grounded near the beginning access of the ford, and they saw the squat stockade of Walla Walla, at the mouth of the creek that came down from the Blue Mountains to the east. They were at the head of the Oregon Territory, or the heart, as the French called it; across the wide terrain cradle between the two mountain ranges ran the Emigrant Road, past Powder River and Sweetwater Pass to the Kansas plains.

The tired, red-eyed men looked at the infinite quiet and virgin rawness there in the fresh July morning and found it hard to believe there was a war.

They unloaded from the boats and began leading the horses out of the water, assembling along the bank, sleepy and exhausted. When they finished caring for the horses, Graham told Sergeant Adams to get the company cleaned up and in order. He had already looked after his own grey, rubbed him dry with grass and pulled the saddle and wiped it, then spread the damp pad and blanket over it in the sun. One thing, Adams thought, if he was a stickler about everything, Graham certainly took care of his own horse.

Adams glanced at the tired men, reluctant to start them cleaning and working their equipment. But there was

Graham, who had come all the way, washed already and wiping off his boots. Almost garrison looking even though he had been in the same uniform for days.

'Yessir,' he told him. 'I'll get 'em started.'

Lieutenant Graham finished his boots and set his cap, measuring its cant automatically. He regarded Adams with his serious brown eyes, shaded from the morning brilliance by the low-drawn visor.

'I want them to ride in smartly. We'll send wagons back for the stores and any wounded who are unable to ride. Leave a couple men with their horses; I don't want any empty horses being led in with the column.'

Adams knew the effect riderless horses would have on the Walla Walla complement. And on the company itself. Any of the wounded who could reach a stirrup would ride in with the rest. But the dregs of the closed fraternity of Old Soldiers was strong in Adams, and he wondered if the young officer knew any of this or was just once again going by his all-seeing almanac, the black-and-white printed regulations.

After the company was mounted, Graham rode along the column and looked at them, then returned to the head beside the guidon rider. 'Break out your flag,' he said. His small gloved hand and arm raised and dropped and the remnants of F Company moved forward, six of the wounded dragoons riding their regular positions in the horse column and sitting in a parade posture on their horses, the odd-looking Alberts squared over their eyes.

'All but three of 'em got mounted up,' Adams said to Graham.

'I expected they would,' Graham answered. Adams thought he saw a brief show of emotion in the young face.

They followed the short road from the ford that led to Walla Walla, joining the Emigrant Road where it passed outside the Fort. The dust sifted around the horses' legs and laid in rifts behind them. There were still unbroken mists hanging in hollows across the fields. One of the soldiers started singing and the others picked it up along the moving column, their voices lusty and strong:

'Oh, we're the Dragoons from the First you see,
And not blest with the name of cavalee,
But our fame's the same and we bear the brunt,
Ain't a name we seek but the fight we want!
Hold a light rein, boys, and go let him prance!
Now put a stiff back in your saddle stance,
Cover down your lead and ride with a pride
Of being kin to the best of them,
The dragoon blue who died!'

The discoloured guidon flapped on the staff with its F and crossed sabres and some of Graham's disciplined restraint slipped away. He began singing, too, unaware of the disbelieving look on his sergeant riding beside him.

Walla Walla was a moderately strong fort. Its stockade held the whites who escaped the war-crazed Yakima and Klickitat warriors, the isolated missionaries and settler families from Wailatpu Creek and the upper Columbia. The walls were built mostly with driftwood from the river; and above the rectangle of fortified posts, on opposite corners, there were two higher bastions which were square and made with heavy logs. These were ported and covered with thick roofs. The Fort was a Hudson Bay Company trading post. Before the Walla Walla uprising friendly Nez Perces, Cayuses and some Yakimas had camped around it, hartering with the civilians and sol-

diers. Now it was deserted outside. The few wickiups and standing tepees were abandoned and drifted over with fine dust.

The Walla Wallá sentries on the firing walk saw the dragoon company coming from the river and shouted to the riding men, one waving his hat. Perhaps a few of them thought the Yakima and Klickitats must have returned to their homes or the small band of soldiers could not have reached the Fort. They were not close enough to see the wounded in the column or to count the men.

The gates were opened and F Company rode in with ceremonial correctness, their peaked hats and the orange trimming and facings on the blue uniforms a flawless pattern along the mounted files. The civilians ran and gathered along the edges of the horseway as the company halted. Graham turned to them; the guidon raised for command. 'Cumneeee, diiismahnt!'

Sergeant Adams stood beside him and held their horses as they waited for the officer coming from the headquarters building. Colonel Woolwine was a brevet colonel. He had rolling shoulders that sloped away from a wide chest span; his short legs were saddle-marked and the right one twisted out at the knee, making him limp. He wore his white hair long and thick on the neck in the habit of older dragoon officers. His eyebrows were curiously black, the dark bristles giving him an odd expression of continual alertness.

'F Company, First Dragoons reporting, sir,' Graham said. 'Lieutenant Graham, commanding.'

Woolwine returned the salute and shook hands. 'Glad to have you, Graham. You replaced Trew Canby.'

'Yes, Sir.'

When he glanced at Adams, Graham started to introduce him, but the colonel waved it off and smiled. 'I know

Adams,' he said, shaking hands with the sergeant. 'Nice to see you again, Adams.'

'Good to be with the regiment again, Colonel.' Adams turned to Graham and said, 'I'll go ahead and get the wagons started back, Lieutenant.'

'Yes. Dismiss the company.' After saluting, Graham told the colonel, 'I'd like a patrol to go along with him, sir.'

'See the adjutant, Adams. He's over having breakfast with A.'

As the sergeant dismissed the others and then led the horses off with him, the two officers watched. 'Good man,' the colonel said. 'Independent sometimes, like a lot of them who have been with us almost since we started the regiment, but a reliable sergeant. Tried to get him to take sergeant major for the regiment but he wanted to stay with F. He's all right.'

They walked towards the headquarters, crossing the narrow field where the piles of belongings and wagons and horses were crowded together. Graham saw some of the children playing around the wagons and their parents washing clothes or starting fires for breakfast. A poorness to all of them, jammed in across every open part of the stockade ground except for the horseway; the homes they had built and all they owned except what they brought with them had been burned and their crops trampled and the livestock driven off or butchered on the spot by the Indians. And he saw how they watched the new dragoon company unsaddling and picketing their horses.

The colonel walked beside him with his rolling gait. 'Doesn't look very pleasant, does it, Lieutenant? Hundred and eighty-five of them, this morning's count. Some don't even have wagons.'

'What is it? What is it that makes the Indian do it, sir?'

'Makes him? I guess we do. Those of our kind who rob and cheat him, ignore treaties we made with him respecting his land. Oh, not them,' he said, motioning at the family carlps. 'Most of them had their three acres planted, looking for a future out here, or else lived among them. It's never them, Lieutenant, but they always pay the hardest. You see them in every war.'

Remembering, Graham said, 'The Indian's not blameless, Colonel. I've seen some of their work.'

The older officer's eyebrows drew down. 'You bet he isn't. He is a savage and will be for a while yet. That's the other half of it. Graham. The noble red man hasn't come about yet.'

They entered the doorway together and went into the colonel's office. The Fort commander hung his hat and sat down, looking at Graham. 'Well, let's have your report, Lieutenant. How many men do you have?'

'Thirteen effective, Colonel, not counting the men we left guarding the Cascades portage and at Dalles. We ran on a war party of eighty or so and had pretty heavy casualties. Nine dead and eight wounded.'

'Thirteen men?'

'They saw us and attacked, sir. We had no choice. They were well mounted and armed.'

'You mean it wasn't Kamiakin and his main party you engaged with but a party farther down the river?'

'Yes, sir.'

Colonel Woolwine leaned forward on his arms on the desk, his white hair settling on his neck. 'Your company was badly needed to reinforce our attempt to get these families back to Vancouver where they'll be safe. Didn't your orders state that?'

'Yes, sir. I was instructed to hide my movement at all times and make every effort to reach here undetected and

in maximum force. Under no circumstances to seek engagement with any Indian parties.'

'I'm glad you remember them nearly verbatim,' the colonel said dryly. 'They sound clear to me.' Colonel Woolwine looked at him closely and Graham knew he was probably thinking of green officers fresh from the Academy. 'I suppose I shouldn't go too hard on you, no experience. If it had been the big party of Indians below us I could understand. But to have a roving war party of eighty pick you up—You ought to be able to move your command on horse without being seen in a country as big as this. That's kind of basic, isn't it?'

'Yes, sir,' Graham said.

'How do you explain being picked up by their scouts?'

'No explanation, sir.'

'What do you mean? Didn't you have your own scouts out? Didn't you make certain that every man in your company knew how important it was to reach here undetected? Something must have happened to put them on you.'

'I'm sorry, Colonel. I have no excuse. After they picked us up the fight was unavoidable. If we attempted to charge them we would have alerted the main force of Kamiakin's and also lost the boats.'

'Boats?' the colonel asked loudly. 'What boats?'

Graham told him how they had obtained the boats from Dalles and used them to come up-river past the siege party of Yakimas and Klickitats. When he finished, Colonel Woolwine sat shaking his head.

'I can't figure out how you can pull something like that and yet not make even a decent covered movement earlier. It was a nice piece of work, getting your company by them,' he said. 'You deserve that, Lieutenant.' Then he stopped thoughtfully and started laughing, leaning back

in the wooden chair with it. 'I'd give ten years' service to see old Kamiakin afterwards,' he said, wiping across his eyes. 'Bet he's using every Indian cussword he knows and all those he learned from us.'

He sobered and leaned at Graham again with the startling, dark eyebrows. 'But I still can't see how you could pull it off and not be able to get by this smaller war party. You sure you're telling me all of it, Lieutenant?'

'I'm sure, sir.' Then Graham said something very unscientific for him. 'I guess we were just lucky, Colonel, getting by Kamiakin. Maybe we couldn't be lucky twice.'

The colonel stood up and shifted down on the leg, one of his sloped shoulders lower than the other. He examined the small lieutenant in front of him.

'We don't run companies by horoscopes or personal seances, Lieutenant. We command, I'm led to believe, because we're somewhat trained in the art of war. We base our tactical plans on what we've been taught to know will probably happen and then it becomes a sort of science. When the luck comes, *if* it comes, it's extra. And it's just that harder on the enemy. But we don't depend on it. And we sure as hell don't plan on it.'

'Yes, sir.'

'I guess I'll let you keep the company, Graham. Maybe I'm overly impressed with your boat trip.' He paused and there was the impenetrable, leather looking parchment of a face again, the eyes regarding Graham from under the long black bristles like twin gun riflings pinning him in their bore. 'Perhaps they'll make a dragoon officer out of you yet, if Kamiakin doesn't get to us before.'

Despite the going over he had got from the old colonel, Graham liked him. 'If I could be excused, sir, I'd like to see to my wounded. Get the surgeon to look after them.'

'You better do that.'

He saluted and turned to leave; Colonel Woolwine's voice cracked behind him. 'Graham!'

'Yes, sir?'

Woolwine appraised his deceptive size, having just noticed as he was leaving that he was not a great deal larger than the bugler boys they used to have, a little more than five feet high. 'Do you like to fight?'

'Yes, sir. Pretty well.'

'Good. When we start trying to get these people out of here I think I can give you several opportunities.'

After he left the Fort with the borrowed wagons, Sergeant Adams brought the wounded men and supplies back along the road from the ford, a patrol from Walla Walla riding with him. The sergeant from A pulled his horse closer to Adams's.

'I'd sure like to believe you boys came up the river past Kamiakin and all them braves.'

'We really didn't,' Adams said. 'We got us some eagles and flew up here.'

The non-commissioned officer laughed and reined back a little.

'See you got yourself a brand new john. Who looked after him in the fight?'

Adams glanced at him. 'I don't expect you'd make him a good orderly even. You'd do smart to stay out of his way, Sarjint. Don't let his size fool you.'

'You sound like some real, honest Injun-fighters. Wait'll you have your chance with old Kamiakin. Or Owahi. You should of been at Wild Horse Creek.'

'We already met him,' Adams said. 'Yesterday.'

They rode along awhile, Adams smiling and looking

at the road ahead of them. 'Ain't goin' to meet him no more,' he said.

'You think he's went back to the mountains? Give up fightin'?'

'No.'

'What're you talkin' 'bout then? You sound wilderness struck.'

'He's dead, 'Sarjint.' He couldn't resist the rest of it and twisted in the saddle and looked on the sergeant from the other company. 'The new john did for him.'

'Hah. Like the eagles.'

Adams was through with it. 'Go back and look at that war bonnet in the wagon,' he said.

Despite what the regimental surgeon believed, Slip Roan did not die. It was a strange thing. What had happened to him was ordinary enough. The arrowhead had gone obliquely into his skull bone above and five centimetres ahead of the ear, angling through the outer bone and into the spongy layer, stopping before going through the last table of bone around his brain. The force of the upward drive of the arrow had knocked him from his horse and thrown him forward, his forehead striking the ground.

He had a cerebral contusion and sub-arachnoid hemorrhage, bleeding between the brain and its protective coverings, and there was also the secondary danger of osteomyelitis of the skull and irreversible damage to the brain itself. The medical report was very specific about why he should die.

Two days he was unconscious and took no water or food, lying in a stupor and partly dead. They did what they could, and the medics shook their heads when Lieutenant Graham or Adams tried to see him in the infirmary. Then quite abruptly, and only complaining of a pound-

ing headache, he rose on his elbow one morning and asked for something to eat.

It was the day Adams was on scouting patrol, helping estimate Yakima strength and routing probable attack marches. When he returned, they let him see Roan. He came into the infirmary with the silt on him from riding, and went to a corner of the room and brushed his sleeves and front. He looked back at Roan who was craning around to see.

'Lay back. You've already run out of lives.'

Roan grinned slightly and rolled his head back as Adams sat on the edge of the bed. 'I didn't have to worry none about gettin' boatsick on the river this time.'

Adams recalled the incident between them, some years ago on the Missouri, and he smiled at Roan. 'I figger you let 'em hit your head so's you wouldn't have to stomach them boats. You missed a lot of fun.'

Roan lay in the bed, staring up, his pupils not normal yet and the right one still larger than the other. 'I heard the lieutenant took the blame for gettin' picked up by that Injun party. You know how they came to find us, Adams,' he said.

'Sure. But ain't nobody blamin' you. I would probably done the same thing. Forget it. It's all done, Slip.'

'I know. But he took the blame for somethin' I did. If we hadn't jumped them Yakimas the big party won't have trailed us back to where the company was. They say the colonel gave him a reamin', almost took the company away from him.'

Sergeant Adams watched his friend. He didn't know much about medical things but he felt vaguely Roan ought to keep quiet and not be worrying about something that was already done.

'Officer is supposed to stick up for his men,' he said.

'Keep it in our family. That's all he did. It's over. Forget it, like I said.'

'I can't. I keep thinkin' of Hardish and Mulaney and Boyd, them others. I helped kill 'em. I been layin' here wonderin' why I got off.'

'You're talkin' like some recruit. You can't fight Injuns without fightin' 'em,' Adams said.

'He knew what he was doin' all 'long. I near hated him once, Adams. I guess that's part of why we attacked them Yakimas. Now he's took the blame for me; let the colonel put it on him.' He lay still on the cot, looking up at the ceiling.

Adams watched him, the swathed bandage covering him like a towel around his head and going across just above his eyes. 'Graham told me he didn't want the company talkin' about it, told me to tell 'em. A direct order. I guess that ought to cover you, too,' he told the southerner, though not roughly.

Roan turned and looked at him intently. 'He ain't so bad, Adams.'

'No,' Adams answered slowly, 'I guess he ain't.'

Roan had closed his eyes so Adams stood up and took his hat off the bed, settling the sword belt and long Colt around him.

'You get some rest. You'll need it. Ridin' to Dalles in one of them jimmy wagons ain't goin' to be easy. The old man's gettin' everybody ready for a flyin' ride, buttin' through them Injuns. Goin' to be a real good one, I figger.'

The other opened his eyes. 'When's he reckon on tryin' it?'

'Don't know. Soon, I guess. Kamiakin's got hisself near thirteen hundred braves now and more comin' if the Shoshones join in the war.'

'The doc says the Fort is packed with civilians, women-folk and kids. I guess the colonel has got hisself a problem,' Roan said.

'He sure has,' Adams agreed. 'Gettin' them out. You know him, he'd like to attack Kamiakin right off, but he can't, thinkin' what it'd be if them Yakimas got a hold of the womenfolk and kids.

'I sure hope they put me back to duty before he makes his move,' Roan said.

'Don't be worryin' about that.' Sergeant Adams put his hand on him lightly, then straightened. 'Get some sleep. Let that thick Carolina head heal up.'

They grinned at each other as Adams left.

10

WALLA WALLA began preparing for movement. The wagons that could be repaired were fixed with parts from those they would leave. Anything that could fire was cleaned and charged, even old Tower muskets and single-shot hand guns. The Hudson Bay employees who had traded with the Walla Walla tribes and bought their skins and furs began packing and loading with the others. A cycle was over. They understood the mountain Yakimas as well as anyone and saw that Leschi's crusade was no longer a past chief wandering around preaching amusing threats. It was fever in the Indians, with Kamiakin as war chief.

Colonel Woolwine had never intended holding out indefinitely, only wanting time for the badly needed reserve company from Dalles to reach him. The food-stocks and forage in the overcrowded Fort were already controlled. Only the smallest children were on full rations. Walla Walla had enough to last maybe ten days more, and that was needed for the journey to the Dalles settlement.

Kamiakin had moved closer to the Fort for his attack. The multiple war parties were restless. He had given them their victories in the raids and massacres across the Territory. There were no whites left between Walla Walla and the Dalles except those trapped in the Fort itself. His magnificent army of warriors was ready for the last phase. He knew the Walla Walla force was weak. No more than

two hundred and fifty Bostons in all the six soldier companies. The long knives had only two loud-speaking guns.

No. Kamiakin was not going to wait any longer. He talked to his councils about the attack. He could send thirteen hundred braves in assault groups of better than three hundred warriors each, moving in four separate directions on the stockade. They would get inside. He had already reserved the white hair of Crooked Leg for his own lance.

After reveille Lieutenant Graham left Adams with some of the men to help assemble the wagon train in the different march serials inside the stockade, and went over to the officers' meeting the colonel had called. The officers of the regiment sat around the table listening to Colonel Woolwine as he showed them the Yakima locations on the map and talked of their strengths.

'What did the scouts give them this morning?' he asked the executive.

'About the same, sir,' the major said. 'Approximately thirteen hundred. Maybe three hundred of them Klicks, the rest Yakimas. Roberts said there are some other tribes represented, but he figures they're fence-straddling and won't amount to much.'

One of the captains leaned across the table. 'Colonel, it isn't going to be hard for us to get out. Or to attack them. We all came here to fight. It's this thing of trying to manoeuvre your company and fight and protect the civilian wagons at the same time.'

'That's right, sir,' the A company commander, a big red-haired officer, said. 'We can't risk anything but limited charges, if that. It'd be all up for these families if

the Indians got between us and the wagons. There aren't more than eighty or ninety rifles in the whole train, some of them handled by kids.' '.

Colonel Woolwine nodded, no humour in the slight smile. 'Kamiakin knows it. He'll try to split us the minute we leave the Fort. With the warriors he has he could engage the whole regiment with half his force and send the rest to attack the wagons. But we aren't going to sit here waiting to be starved out. We'll get *some* of them through if we attack first.'

'You think we could treat with him to give the civilians safe passage?' the major asked. 'If we can get them out we'll take our chances, Colonel. An Indian doesn't like a good charge and it's our best move. But like McCloyd says, we can't risk any because they'd separate us from the wagons.'

'No,' Colonel Woolwine replied, curling the lower part of his mouth over. 'Even though they would be leaving Walla Walla country Kamiakin would know we were bargaining from weakness. You'd have to have something to influence him, Cary, one way or another.'

'Well, sir, we don't have anything like that.'

'There's a bright side to it, sir,' one of the officers said. He was an older dragoon captain, on his jaw a long knife scar that pulled his cheek in. 'We'll all get a liberal military education in this operation. Make some new doctrine.'

The others laughed, temporarily forgetting their concern for the women and children who would be in the wagons.

Lieutenant Graham listened to them talking and sat quietly. They were all senior to him, older and experienced. But there was the odd confidence he always had that kept working at him. When he had asked for the company in Oregon he had read everything he found on

it and talked to soldiers who had served there, wanting to know all he could about the Walla Walla and Wailatpu stocks of Indians.

Sitting there at the meeting, he did not think he knew the Yakimas on the ground as the others did, but what he was thinking about was a natural trait and you did not have to see it physically to know they had it. So Edward Shirley Graham rose to present his idea.

'Colonel Woolwine, I think we can influence him. Not to treat, but to get the civilians *behind* him and towards Dalles and still give us some chance to pick our time and place to fight.'

It was outspoken and Graham knew it. He saw the surprised executive and the deliberate way the other officers turned to look at him, as if they had not really known he was in the room. But like the boats and the things about the army he believed in, Graham looked back at them and didn't withdraw.

'Kamiakin has every warrior he can muster down here in the valley on this side of the river because he knows the settler's road is the only way we can get to Dalles with wagons,' he said. 'But they're some distance from their villages in the Cascades on the *other* side of the Columbia. He couldn't have left more than dog soldiers and old men as guards.'

The scarred captain of dragoons regarded the young graduate enduringly. 'This isn't exactly new intelligence, Lieutenant.'

'It has a part in what I'm trying to say, sir,' Graham told him. The cold, impatient looks were going around the whole table and becoming less interested. 'The Yakimas know an army unit came up-river to the Fort.'

Their laughter interrupted, going noisily around the room and he waited, sensing a hot feeling but holding

himself in as he had when they kidded him about being picked up by the Yakimas.

'What they don't know is the size of the reinforcement or whether my company was the only one.'

'You mean we can scare them off by pretending we spirited the whole Second Dragoon regiment up from Texas and Kansas?' the red-haired one asked pleasantly, and everyone grinned.

'Yeah,' another officer said. 'We'll get us two headquarters flags and wave them at them.'

Graham felt his temper coming. The colonel sat at the far end of the table, actually starting to be interested but enjoying the hazing a little, too. It was pretty much tradition to have fun with a new john, part of his indoctrination.

'If a detachment crossed the ford and rode up to the villages and set the lodges on fire,' Graham said, 'and created a good ruckus, don't you believe it might draw the Yakimas off, sir? Particularly if Kamiakin didn't know whether it was additional troops or how large the force was?'

The older captain slapped the table. 'There you are, sir. Graham has it all figured out for us.'

Colonel Woolwine rubbed his face, then put his hands together and looked at Graham. 'How do you plan on getting them up there? They would deal pretty quickly with a small force like that. Their scouts would put two or three hundred braves on you in an hour.'

'I thought about that, sir. The detachment would start out when it was just getting light, before sunup, and a demonstration force could ride out of the Fort at the same time. Make them believe we were attacking them and the detachment could get up there under the cover of the excitement.'

The old colonel sat a few minutes, thinking, moving the backs of his knuckles on his face again. He looked out the windows and across the gathered wagons on the stockade field.

'The detachment would have to get up there fast,' he said, still watching out the window. 'If it didn't work we would lose both the demonstration force and the men in the detachment.' He turned and looked at all of them. 'But if it *did* work, we could stampede these wagons a-helling toward Dalles when the Yakimas were drawn off by the fires. We could put two companies to guard the rear of the wagon train and use the other four to charge the daylighters out of the Yakimas going up to the mountains. It's a big chance, all right.'

Graham was still standing, small and very erect, as they all watched him. 'It'll work, sir.'

The other officers saw the amazing confidence of this jockey-sized second lieutenant. You could get provoked with his cockiness, they thought, but you had to admire a little how much the john believed in himself. Here he was, bracing Woolwine, Old Crooked Leg, who pushed his dead horse off a shattered knee at Mexico City and helped rush Chapultepec Castle on one leg. The officer who rode with Zack Taylor at Buena Vista and with the *beau sabreur* of them all, Phil Kearney, who lost an arm at Churubusco. Colonel John E. Woolwine, who had fought Mescalero Apaches and Comanches and Sioux and Utes and Pawnees and then gone around to fight them all over again. The man Kit Carson said fought better with one good leg than most men he knew with two of them. Here Graham was, a fresh-washed second with hardly a month's field experience, teaching the old man tactics. They all waited for Woolwine to destroy him.

'You really believe it will work, don't you, Lieutenant?'

Graham's deceptively wide and open eyes looked over the length of the table. 'Yes, sir. I know it will.'

'Whom do you propose for this detachment?'

'F Company, Colonel.'

'Your company?' It was coming now, they thought.

'Yes, sir.'

'You didn't manage to get by a war party once before with your gallant company, Graham. Do you think you might get up to their villages in time?'

Graham felt his face flushing as the other officers hid their grins, waiting. 'Yes, sir, I do.'

Old Woolwine had actually been testing him, wanting to be certain he was sure of his own convictions. Perhaps even in his wisdom and long service the colonel could not say exactly why he took to this plan which he knew was wild and unpredictable. Not the specific reason. Maybe he was remembering when he and four hundred other unskilled cavalymen drove off nearly five thousand of Santa Anna's lancers. *That* hadn't looked initially promising there in the mountain pass south of Saltillo, either. Or maybe he was thinking of the war bonnet Adams had shown him, and that Graham's report was very general about who killed Owahi.

'All right, we'll try it.' He rose. Now that his mind was decided he didn't qualify or try to justify his decision. He believed in lighting the cannon or pulling the wick out.

'Pick some of your best men and horses, Graham. Brief them on this fully. The success will depend on your getting up there. The rest of your company will be attached to C Company until you get back.'

'Yes, sir. I'd like to take about ten men.'

'Be set to move a half hour before sunup. McCloyd,' he said to the red-haired captain, 'I want you to take the

demonstration. Make it look good and like a real attack, but don't get your company engaged if you can manage it. Once the wagons are through, break off and take rear guard behind them.' He spread out the map and motioned to the officer with the gun detail. 'Put the two howitzers down along here and conceal their positions.'

They hunched around the table as he made the assignments of the companies and went over the details of the plan. Their positions until the Yakimas started crossing the ford; their flank and rear charges and how they would be executed; howitzer fire.

Graham listened to the old officer as he refined the basic plan, hardly pausing as he talked, his short sentences products of his terse, professional thinking. Graham saw why his picture hung in the Academy.

'I don't expect much pursuit if this goes right,' Colonel Woolwine said when he had finished. 'If there is we can deal with it. The wagons *ahead* of us. They won't have the chance to cut us off from them.'

When he dismissed them and sent a runner to bring the wagon bosses and scouts for a briefing, Graham left with the other officers. He looked around the lines of closely spaced wagons and teams for Adams and found him helping load and position the last segments of the train along near the back wall of the stockade.

The wagons were drawn up in seven different columns, parallel to each other and separated by five or six feet between them. There were seven or eight wagons in each one of the columns and the teams were practically nose to tailboard, lined up tightly behind each other. The leading wagon of the first column was standing close to the stockade gates, ready to pull out, and the succeeding columns would swing their lead teams behind the last wagon as the column next to them pulled out and they

left Walla Walla for the Dalles. The bigger horses were in the last part of the train and there were about sixty wagons in all.

Adams saw the lieutenant approaching and finished with his instructions to the drivers, who were gathered around him.

'Don't move your wagons out of their places when you unhitch tonight. It's your place in line. Anybody that ain't got a relief driver for their wagon, come over to the storehouse after supper.'

As they started drifting away Graham told Adams of the plan and named some of the men he wanted, among them Sam Beard and the sergeant himself. Sergeant Adams stood listening, his long arms angled out and thumbs hooked over his sword belt and his big-nosed face expressionless. He might have lacked formal education, but Adams had practical schooling in the plains and mountains and knew his soldiering. He thought the plan had a good chance of tactical surprise and liked it.

'Sounds pretty good, Lieutenant,' he said. 'Specially if we can give them bucks a taste of minie balls with the cannons when they're crossin' the ford. Ain't nobody gets used to howitzers.'

'Have the men make up two or three torches apiece,' Graham told him.

'This's goin' to be real fine pleasure, Lieutenant. We'll have ourselves the biggest bonfire this country's seen and I'll be thinkin' of the Cascades and Celilo all the time it's burnin'. Just hope we get back in time to join the fun down here.'

Adams started to leave and Graham called after him. 'Sergeant?'

The towering figure stopped. 'Yes, Lieutenant?'

Graham hesitated as the sergeant waited, then said, 'I was just going to say I'll be at the orderly tent in ten or fifteen minutes.'

The company sentry woke Sergeant Adams and the lieutenant the next morning before it was light. They rose and pulled on their equipment and the mist lay around the camp, blurring their shapes as they moved around waking the others. While Graham and another dragoon set out the cartridges and rations, Sergeant Adams got the rest of the detachment saddling the horses. Their forms appeared and disappeared in the damp sheening fog as they worked quietly, tying the torches across on the blanket rolls.

Lieutenant Graham left to talk to the colonel and the other commanders after the issue was completed. Adams and the nine dragoons led their horses down beside the stockade gates where A Company was mounting and assembling for their attack demonstration. The howitzer detail was working near them and one of the gunners cursed in the darkness, fumbling with lashing the mountain gun on the packhorse. They harassed each other good-naturedly to take the edge off their nerves as they prepared in the chill of predawn for the attack.

Sergeant Adams waited on his high-shouldered, powerful gelding, holding Graham's horse, wondering what it was the lieutenant was going to say yesterday by the wagons. And it made him remember talking with Roan in the infirmary about Graham's loyalty. He was not as unfeeling about what the officer had done as it had seemed to Roan. He felt an unclear and unfamiliar feeling waiting there now for Graham and before he could understand it, another crowded in. Angela Graham and her

slim white face in the buggy. Graham's too, saying, *'Sometimes it's better to run than fight.'*

'But he still does some things that don't make sense,' Adams said.

'What, Sarjint?' someone asked on the horse behind him.

Adams swung around, then relaxed back in the deep well of his hunched shoulders. 'Nothin'.'

Lieutenant Graham came walking back and swung up on his grey and the detachment slipped out singly through the partly opened gate, riding some yards apart from each other. They moved their horses quietly in the soft dirt along the thick wall of the stockade and continued in the spaced single file until they reached a spoon-shaped draw near the river ford. They gathered there in the shadows and hanging mist and waited.

A few minutes went by. Abruptly there was the clear sound of the bugle. And on the last notes they heard the far-off overrunning noise of hoofs and the jingling metal and then gunshots as A Company charged from the Fort towards the camps of Kamiakin.

Adams grinned as he heard the other company riding in the wild night charge. 'Sure makin' a racket,' he commented. 'Them Injuns'll think there's two or three regiments a-comin'.'

They heard the nearer sounds of splashing in the river ahead of them. The men tensed as the small band of Yakimas broke out of the water and heeled their ponies in the direction of the war camps. Individually and in twos and threes the ring of Indian scouts and ambush parties came across the river ford and along the bank, riding from where before there had been only silence. Some passed within twenty yards of the dragoons waiting in the dry ravine.

When they waited another ten minutes and heard no more Yakimas, Lieutenant Graham signalled to them. The patrol of dragoons rode over the edge of the gully, and halted a few seconds, then galloped down to the river's edge and thrust their horses across the Columbia's ford. The dusk was lightening around them as they spurred up the slope on the other side and rode towards the wooded reaches and sagebrush of the mountains, towards the Yakima lodges high in the Cascades.

Kamiakin's successes had not made him overly confident and careless, as it had some of his braves. He was on a hill near Walla Walla with some of his deployed scouts when the detachment under Graham raced away from the river.

And the eyes which could see the motionless santaupé deer in the khaki grass and the black spots of the silver-coloured salmon twisting away in the silvery river now saw the moving blue of the distant horsemen.

A young buck about nineteen or twenty, called Tomahi, sighted them first and rode to his chief. As he slid from the pony, Kamiakin was with the subchief Skloo, lying up behind a high point of rocks and observing. They had heard the curious wind-horn of the long knives blowing and the far-off firestick sounds near the white fort.

Tomahi made his respects and told him of the whites he had seen. Towards our lodges, he said. A small number of Bostons.

Kamiakin climbed down from the rocks, his great war dress hanging on him, almost a demigod in appearance. No more than medium tall, he was hard and burnished looking and powerfully formed; the copper colouring ran underneath the taut skin of his cheeks and around his fine mouth. His eyes were dark, lustrous agates.

'The mother deer leads off the hunter from the fawn, who is already dead,' he said. 'Bostons *mamake to-mah na-was*. They work spell.' Kamiakin smiled to himself.

But suddenly they heard the firestick sounds nearer, echoing up to them louder, and the drumming of many horses. He hurried beside Skloo, who lay watching from the rocks. In the growing dawn they saw the approaching figures of the long knives, their tight line of horses charging across the river plain towards the lower fringes of the war camps below the hill. Kamiakin saw his own warriors rushing for their ponies and riding about wildly as they gathered to meet the unexpected attack of the long knives.

Kamiakin whirled and signed to the young Tomahi. 'Go quickly! With the speed of wind let your pony move and warn your villages. Tell the elders Kamiakin will send warriors when he can, if the Great Spirit wills them to live in this battle.'

Tomahi slid his naked legs over his pony and kicked his first spring into a fast gallop as he angled down the hill towards the river. Behind him, his chief and Skloo mounted and rode with their retinue to the fighting below.

The young Indian scout did not ride for the ford near Walla Walla but took the shorter distance, swimming his short-legged pony across the river farther down and climbing to his dripping back on the far bank. As he urged the running pony up towards the mountains Tomahi leaned on his neck and spoke in the notched ears. 'Our bodies, yours too, my pony, are made from the earth by the Great Spirit and we are different from the whites. They are here to take our land and the streams we fish, the free ground which was ours. Our villages are far away. You must carry me with the swiftness of the mountain

wind that cooled your mother's teat as you suckled; you are as me, pony, a warrior and must give your life to reach our lodges before them. You must run with your legs and with your lungs and with your heart; and when the others are gone, you must run from the heart alone. Hear me, pony, I do not wish to abuse you as I must and run you so fast and so hard; but I must close my heart to what I feel. The Great Spirit will take you as he made you, pony, into the earth. I have no more words to say.'

When the pony's flanks drew and shuddered with the speed that was destroying him, Tomahi caressed his wet neck as they galloped up the back trails of the mountains and heeled him faster still. He rode swiftly between stands of trees and across patches of bunch grass and sage, knowing these mountains and following the slender marked trails that were the quickest in the race to the villages.

Tomahi sliced far above and ahead of the detachment of dragoons and rode in among the lodges and jumped down from the pony. As he ran shouting into the villages the pony, heaving and ringed with froths of its own sweat, and dying, went down on forelegs and then rolled over in a thin rake of dead pine needles.

The Yakima villages clustered over a natural land table that was like a plateau; the squat lodge shapes were mostly in a pattern of rows, and some reached as far as the edge of the deep cut of the river that ran down to the Colar below. The lodges and huts were not moved about, as the field wickiups and tepees had heavy wood frames and their coverings were fifteen to twenty-five feet long and almost as wide. Thick animal hides covered them for the mountain winters. Most of the lodges were cone-like at the top, others were rounded, bowlike, in the style of Osages.

Tomahi began running along the street rows between the huts, shouting. The squaws left the stretched strips

of wood and crosspieces inside the lodges, which were used for drying meat and salmon, and came rushing out, jabbering among themselves. Others dropped their sticks of firewood where they were and gathered the fringed bottoms of their elkhide garments and ran with the rest. The old men rose from their spear- and arrow-making. Tomahi yelled and raced past them, seated around on the ground, holding lumps of obsidian on their thighs, a piece of hardened cedar under it, breaking the stones for arrow points. The chipping of the edges to make the barbed war blade of the Yakimas was like diamond-cutting in selecting and breaking the stones; these older men, laid aside from hunting and war, were expert at it.

But as the slim form of Tomahi passed them and ran on, they leaped up and took their bows and spears from the lodges and gathered with the youths who were not yet warriors, the dog soldiers.

The Yakimas scurried around among the huts and lodges, taking their weapons, even a few of the squaws running with the small bows and one carrying an old muzzle-loading Tower. They herded the *caballadas* of ponies with the ropes around their necks that tied them all close together and drove them quickly towards the concealing, steep-dropping bank of the river or to the pine-shrouded ledges higher in the mountains. Four bucks who had returned for a change of ponies were in the villages, and with Tomahi they directed the Yakima preparations to ambush the approaching soldiers.

At daylight the dragoons had reached the main ascent, and the horses bunched, then began galloping up the steep and winding trail. Sergeant Adams rode near the head behind Graham, feeling the slapping branches on his

arms and legs. His hawk face pressed forward in the morning wind, the slender lips drawn in a continuous, automatic smile.

Lieutenant Graham handled his grey lightly, getting all of him in the face to the Indian lodges, keeping just ahead of Adam's big panting gelding.

Uphill they went, driven by the desperate timing of the plan, the many-hoofed sounds ringing off the slates of stones. They approached and passed the colourful Horse Heaven hills, nearing the Indian villages. At the top of a gentle rise where the ground flattened, their own noise drowned that of the unshod Indian ponies of Tomahi and four other braves riding down and turning off the trail to wait.

The Yakimas, young and leaderless, had not stopped to gauge how far away the pony soldiers were, and were not prepared when the dragoons came up over the angling trail and ran full on them.

It was a violent surprise meeting. The soldiers reared their horses and then swung apart on the narrow width of the mountain trail and charged the five Indians three abreast. The Yakimas rode in recklessly with lance and tomahawk; their horses collided, the dragoons whirling and chopping with the broad sabres.

The second rank of horsemen in the detachment reined into the milling animals and men, and two of the Yakimas slid off their ponies under the shifting hoofs. But these Indians were horsemen, too, and now closed with the dragoons, using their hand weapons.

Sergeant Adams wrestled half off his pony, locking arms around a warrior's lance as he tried to get in a thrust with his own sabre. But Tomahi sliced in behind him and swung his tomahawk. The blow missed Adams's head and glanced along his shoulder. He jerked with it and lost

his hold on the other brave's lance; but he reared the gelding against the smaller Indian pony, spilling its rider, and came around on the one behind him with a two-handed sabre stroke. It drove Tomahi sideways from his pony, his neck broken from the force of Adams's sabre.

Graham reined in and out with the other dragoons among the thrusting horses on the thin confines of the trail, standing in his stirrups and sabring an Indian Adams had knocked from his pony as the Yakima tried to draw off to the side with his bow. The other dragoons blocked their horses together on the last mounted Yakima, and one of the privates raised his sabre. But he never used it. The brave jumped from his pony behind the soldier and knifed him twice in the upper arm. The dragoon fell from his horse, and Sam Beard climbed across to the Yakima and grappled with him. They both slipped from the horse and rolled into the bushes with their knives, their bodies thrashing and tumbling around in the foliage beside the mountain trail.

One of the first Yakimas had caught his pony, but was not trying to escape. He screamed at them and met the dragoon who spurred up the trail towards him, and the lance with its worked stone point impaled the soldier. He fell off his horse, both hands gripping the shaft of the lance in his chest. '*Ai-yah!*' the warrior yelled, and with his death whoop charged his pony down into the dragoons, his swinging tomahawk thonged around his wrist.

Adams saw one of the soldiers ride at the Indian with a practiced cavalry stance, the sabre held up before his eyes and faced to parry the tomahawk. The Yakima got his swing, but the soldier caught the handle on his sabre and with almost a continuous stroke, slashed down where the Indian's neck and shoulder joined. Sergeant Adams turned to Beard fighting on the ground. But there was no

need. The Choctaw was getting up slowly, his uniform ripped in two or three places, the knife in his hand.

Lieutenant Graham and Adams dismounted quickly by the dragoon who had been wounded, and Adams went over to the one with the lance in him. The second man was dead, the other's arm was bleeding. One of the men jumped down and took cloths from his saddle pack.

After his arm was bandaged hurriedly, Graham asked him, 'Can you ride?'

As he nodded, Adams came over to the lieutenant. 'He can take lookout when we get to the lodges, Lieutenant. Might have been others behind these Injuns. We'd better get up there quick before they give 'em warnin' about us.'

The mounted their horses and Adams reached his arm over his shoulder and felt the torn place in his jacket, the shallow tomahawk wound. It did not hurt a great deal, but it was bleeding and he felt a numbness starting in his right arm. He did not say anything as they fell in double file and galloped up the trail. Above them, the alerted village waited.

AFTER FIFTEEN MINUTES of riding, their noses caught the smell of skins and musty animal grease odours. They slowed the horses and walked them cautiously as they neared the Yakimas' villages. Adams discovered his hand would not work properly, the fingers almost without feeling. But in the wry way he sometimes considered things, he grinned to himself. Like most dragoons he did not particularly like the sabre or think it was much good for close fighting with Indians. Now he had an honest excuse. It was the only thought he gave just then to having one functioning arm.

Graham stopped them below the lodges in a small tree grove. The strip of mountain plateau where the Yakima homes were levelled several hundred feet above them.

'No shooting squaws or children,' he told them. 'We'll go through once and make enough noise to drive them out. Four of you herd them to one end of the villages out of the way.'

'They don't respect our womenfolk, Lieutenant,' one dragoon said tightly.

Graham looked at him. 'Do you want to become like *them*, Anders, or have them more like us?'

He divided the detachment into two squads, sending one around to hit the villages from the upper side. The wounded Christy was sent to a summit of ground where he could give them warning when the hundreds of Yakimas started up from the river valley.

They moved slowly up the widening trail, wanting to get as close as possible before riding into the villages.

'Funny you don't hear no dogs barkin',' the soldier behind Adams said. 'You'd think they'd be smellin' us by now.'

Some of the others looked at him and shrugged, his meaning lost in their own tension as they proceeded another fifty feet up towards the lodges.

The first arrow whirled from the shielding bushes and one of the leading dragoons fell without a sound. Graham shouted and they broke into a gallop, charging past the volley of arrows. The two groups separated and raced their horses through the narrow street passages among the lodges and huts, yelling wildly and firing their pistols. As they crisscrossed and galloped through the villages, the squaws and children ran from the lodges and rose up along the passageways, screaming and running around, adding their noise to the din of dogs and shots and yelling dragoons.

The dog soldiers and arrow-makers began shooting from their hiding places but their excited aims were bad and none of the dragoons were hit. As they turned about for the second charge, lighting their torches, Adams and his squad broke off, and bucking and wheeling their horses behind the scurrying Indians, they edged the squaws away from the lodges. He reined the gelding one-handed, his useless right arm hanging, shifting to his knee as he drew his pistol awkwardly in his left hand.

Lieutenant Graham and the others swept through the villages with the torches, firing the dried skins and cloth, some of the lodges springing bright in flame as the poles and coverings took fire. The parfleche trunks, the Yakima's store place for nearly everything, began burning inside the huts and lodges and the pallling smoke shifted and billowed around the dragoons and screaming Indians.

Back and forth the detachment rode, fighting their horses' dislike of the smoke, forcing them back into it and firing dozens more of the lodge hutments that spread along the entire length of the long plateau. In the smoke and excitement the dog soldiers could not find one another to assemble or even see the soldiers. Whole sections of the villages burned and the fire made its way to other lodges, strings of them breaking into flame with the tinder dryness of the wooden frames and coverings and the fanning wind.

Graham reassembled the detachment as they rode out, and Adams turned off with his men and joined him.

'If that don't bring 'em, Lieutenant, nothin' will!'

'It will. It has to.'

Some of the young dog soldiers had formed with the arrow-makers and were ducking behind logs and trees, shooting at the dragoons. Another of Graham's men went off his horse, and he split the remaining six into two groups again. They galloped around the village edges to strike from new directions.

Down by Walla Walla, the Yakimas had begun to move on the first telling smokes. Their ponies became a gathering avalanche of knee-to-knee warriors as the black smoke raised on the horizon above their villages. It was without plan or order as they sprang up from the many scattered camps, leaving their wickiups and mounting the fleet ponies and racing towards the ford and their lodges in the mountains. Kamiakin tried to arrange order among the chaos of horsemen; but he and his subchiefs had to give up trying to control it and rode with the wild rush. The great warring force of Indians spanned its unbelievable breadth across the complete table plain beside the

river and passed outside the Fort in a multiple-legged stampede of drumming ponies and naked, arched braves.

Company A had broken off with the Yakimas as they had been instructed. The wholesale withdrawal of the Indians made their disengagement easy, and they turned back towards the stockade.

The howitzer detail flanking the ford approaches waited until the bulk of the Yakimas had funnelled into the water, narrowing and massing on the ford. Then they began their fire. Uptilt cannon. Load, fuse, fire. Uptilt cannon. Load, fuse, fire. Their hands blurred motion. The short-range minie balls and frag exploded among the packed mass of ponies and warriors, the target everywhere and needing little gunnery aim at that distance. The gaping holes in the jammed ranks of Yakimas appeared and were instantly covered over with the living as others surged over their floating comrades and animals in the panic of trying to get away from the abrupt and unseen howitzer fire.

As the Indians turned in confused indecision on the bank, the four companies of dragoons with Crooked Leg in their echeloned centre came riding from the Fort and formed, charging the Yakimas' flanks and rear. Many of them fell from their ponies in the pistol fire and raking sabres that came in the new direction behind them. Disorganized and milling around along the river bank and in the water, they splintered in fleeing parties and some who were not killed in the first sudden charge by the dragoons tried to cross the ford under the howitzers.

Woolwine pulled about on his black horse, holding the long-barrelled Colt. 'We've got them on the run, boys! Come in now, Cary, with the companies, hold on them again!'

The dragoons broke off in perfect discipline and withdrew on the trumpet recall, reforming three hundred yards away in the long, abreast line and coming galloping in the charge again. They cut through the scattering Yakimas. It was beautiful and deadly and terrible. The greater half of the Indians somehow reached the opposite bank of the Columbia. Unable to cope with the suddenness of the charging attacks and the howitzer fire, their homes afire in the mountains above them, they were finished.

The river was strewn with their floating dead, the bodies twisting and moving in the impersonal current; and the upper banks of the ford were covered with dead and dying braves and the screaming wounded ponies. The long knives had accomplished what Kamiakin knew they could not do. They had made their tightly disciplined charges in their whole strength and had picked the place in which to do it.

The gunners raised their howitzer fire and, sighting on the retreating Yakimas, quickly fused shots in the alternating fire of the two guns on the last Indians leaving the river on the far bank. The bugle signalled above the battle's noise, and the firing stopped.

Colonel Woolwine rapidly assembled his men, some of whom had ridden after the few remaining Yakimas on the Walla Walla side of the river. They re-formed in companies and rode back towards the Fort to await Graham's signal for starting the wagon train moving towards Dalles.

High in the Cascades above the engagement, Graham and his dragoons were having trouble controlling their frightened horses in the burning fires and smoke that

swirled around them. They gathered together near the edge of the plateau, hearing faint sounds below, mixed with the noise of barking dogs and the Indians around the burning villages.

Christy came riding hard from the head of the trail and stopped beside them. 'They're comin'! They're all comin'!'

'Let's move out!' Graham ordered.

'Sure like one crack at this first bunch of bucks,' Adams said sadly, forgetting he had been unable to reload his pistol and that it was holstered empty. He had laid his hand upon the saddle, his arm across the upper part of his leg; they could not see it was useless.

Lieutenant Graham looked from his grey, shifting and backing around from the smoke and flaming lodges. 'They'll need every man of us,' he said. 'Our orders were to get back. They won't move the wagons until we report the whereabouts of the bulk of the Yakimas.' He paused and grinned. 'But we're bound to meet some of them on the way down.'

In that brief instant Adams and his officer found the closeness they had missed so long. It came intangibly and simply, no more than a flash of transference in the quick meeting of their eyes; then they turned with the others and rode down from the burning Yakima lodges.

A short way down-trail they came on a side branch that would take them around the main part of the approaching Yakimas. They did not want to meet them on these narrow access trails where there was no chance for movement or flexibility. As they turned in a slender passageway that ran along behind some high rocks, a large party of Indians appeared not far below them.

They moved in back of the shielding rocks. Graham rode beside Adams. As he passed behind the sergeant's

First he saw the matting blood on the ripped jacket and glanced quickly at Adams. His arm was lying across his leg, the hand turned up, and Graham realized he had seen it the same way earlier.

He looked at his sergeant and knew what must be done for any of his detachment to reach Walla Walla with word to move the wagons. Graham decided it quickly, with no longer thought. It was his job to see the regiment was notified.

'Down this trail and bear south until you reach the river,' he told them. 'We can't meet them here.'

'They've seen us, Lieutenant.'

'I don't know if they have.' He looked at Adams. 'Don't stop for anything, Sergeant. Let's go!'

They spurred their horses through the recessed passage-way and broke into the wider stretches among the trees. But Lieutenant Graham did not follow. He turned his horse suddenly as they rode off and, looking after them once, headed the grey back past the rocks to the trail above the Yakimas.

He yelled at them and shot one of the leading riders, wheeling around and galloping up towards the burning lodges. They had seen the officer's markings when he fired on them. It was enough. They pressed their ponies together and came up the trail after him past where the detachment had gone.

Graham rode around the edge of the trees near the burning huts and lodges and swung down below them towards the other end of the villages. As he passed through the smoke and they lost him, he jumped down and grabbed one of the torches they had dropped. He lighted it from one of the hutments and galloped the grey to the upper part of the plateau where the lodges were untouched.

He slowed beside a line of them and held the torch, riding on the next as each caught fire. He had no real plan now other than to get them all burning and keep the Yakimas busy as long as he could.

But hundreds of them were reaching the mountains and closing on their villages. They saw the new fires breaking out and converged towards that burning area.

Lieutenant Graham straightened with the torch as he saw fifty or sixty Yakimas riding towards him. He looked around quickly. He had reached the higher limits of the villages. Behind him the escarped face of the rocks rose sheer and impassable. On the down side of the mountains below him came the warriors on their ponies.

He wheeled away from them and cut in among a series of burning lodges, still carrying the torch and dragging it across an lodge that was not on fire. But the Yakimas swerved their ponies and merged with other arriving parties as they rode after him through the shifting patches of smoke. He felt a hard something go in his back and sear along the shoulder blade. He grabbed under theommel rim to keep from falling. The torch was suddenly heavy and slipped down in his hand, but he clenched it and held on.

An arrow struck the grey high in the neck and the horse staggered. Graham bent forward, bleeding from his shoulder and back, and broke off the arrow shaft. The grey screamed but with the hanging weight gone from his neck muscle he gathered himself under Graham.

They had boxed Graham, and two separate groups of Yakimas came riding towards him, wanting all of this special kill.

Even then, when he was afraid, Lieutenant Graham did not think about being killed. He had planned his career from when he first saw a soldier in Albany, New

York; and had set down the specific things he would learn and the time it would take to master each one. It was all plotted systematically ahead. Like the Academy test for which he began studying when he was eleven. He was not ambitious in the regular meaning of the word; it was simply he had decided he must be among the best officers in the army. Promotion and recognition were not part of it except he hoped the Indians might give him some *other* name for a special thing he had done, or that happened to him. He had even thought of choosing a motto which he would not mention as a junior officer but some day would use in the heraldic and professional way older officers did. In this last he was perhaps two men, one of them partially a dreamer. But the dreamer was always weak and the scientist strong. And it was the scientist's mind that impelled both men in him. He realized he had not selected a motto. He had been given no Indian name. And there were other things. . . .

Lieutenant Graham faced the Yakimas with the wound in his shoulder hurting badly. He rode into the group coming on his left and flung the torch at them. A leading brave fired at him and missed; Graham shot with the pistol and killed him and kept shooting with it until it was empty. Then they were all around him and thrusting with their lances, wanting it to be slow for him. He threw away the pistol and worked the sabre loose from the leather scabbard with his left hand and charged them in short rushes, flailing with it inexpertly in the wrong hand, somehow still on his horse and fighting.

Two more Yakimas went off their ponies, hacked by the wild swings of his sabre. There were more than forty harrying him now, to his front and in back and on the sides. There was not room to set and charge his horse. The bright new uniform with orange trimmings was

ripped and sliced where the lances caught him, he had been wounded at least six or seven times. A Yakima who was dying from one of Graham's sabre strokes rose up enough from the ground to fire his rifle.

The heavy calibre ball struck Graham just below the jaw and snapped his head around. The sabre fell to the ground. But even as he fell across the grey's neck he pushed himself up from the clipped army mane where his own blood was matting with that of his grey's, stood in the stirrups, urged his horse forward and charged another Yakima from his pony. And on July sixteenth, a few minutes before eleven o'clock, Second Lieutenant Edward Shirley Graham, F Company, First Dragoons, United States Army, died.

Kamiakin kned his pony through his braves, his tightly drawn face lighted by the burning lodges. The *polakly illeha*, the land of darkness, had closed on the young enemy. Kamiakin looked awhile at the small still body, and at the dappled grey army horse that had stumbled a few steps ahead and died.

'Pony soldier, we do not understand what makes you act. With us, we are born chiefs, I state this true. It is the blood duty of us to lead. But you are only a common man among common men and you come to our lands and take your dying as a true chief,' he said. 'We do not understand your way, or from where heart of a chief comes.'

There were *abees* of assent among his warriors. Kamiakin moved nearer the body of Graham. 'Chief of Ten Lances, it is good that your stock dies with you. It is a valiant strain. A strain of tall men. This much I speak.'

After Graham had turned them into the side trail to the south, Sergeant Adams and the detachment galloped

headlong down through the scattered trees. When the expected pursuit of the large Yakima party did not come they reined their horses, skidding. Looking back, they discovered the lieutenant was not with them.

They were nearly three miles down from the mountain lodges and now there were hundreds of the Indians between them and their officer. There was not the smallest chance of getting through to him.

Knowing what Graham had done, Adams looked from his horse and watched the rising smoke from the lodges above them. Feeling the paralysis of his numbed shoulder and arm, he cursed it. He cursed because he knew he could not break orders and risk the five other men and their mission in going back. It would make Graham's own sacrifice useless.

'Mebbe he got out,' Sam Beard said, not believing it.

'That lieutenant. That crazy rule-book lieutenant.' Adams turned his dark eyes on Beard. 'But he ain't crazy,' he said, wanting to explain something. 'God help him, he ain't crazy.'

He stared at Beard almost vacantly. His thinking was clouded. What was happening to him?

Suddenly shrill Indian cries came from the woods farther down the mountain. They saw a Yakima party of nearly a hundred warriors threading their ponies up through the trees.

'Eeeeyah!' Adams yelled, his soldier's instincts working as he shouted the patrol into a gallop off to the side of the Indians.

They drew their pistols and rode in a weaving charge, firing rapidly as they pierced the leading line of Yakimas. Adams, having to hold the reins with the one good hand and weaponless, kept yelling as he rode into them with the others. The big gelding slammed his running forelegs

and thirteen hundred pounds of downhill momentum into the lighter Indian horses coming up towards them, bowling over horses and riders with his wide, prow of chest.

They killed one or two braves and split through the Yakima ranks with their moving charge and weight of horse and rider, continuing past and down the steep slope towards the river. A dragoon took an arrow in his side, and Sam Beard swung alongside him. He caught the free lines of the running horse and slowed him enough to get his arm around the wounded dragoon and haul him across to his own horse. Sam went crashing through the low sagebrush with the double load on his horse, still holding his pistol in the hand that was around the other dragoon.

The six men moved wide towards the south as they descended. They came on several straggling warriors as they doubled back in the direction of the ford over the Columbia; but the Indians ducked low and rode their ponies off in great haste towards the north. Adams figured they were probably Klickitats or Cayuses.

In another ten minutes the detachment broke from the tree line near the foot of the mountains and galloped past the sagebrush and across the smooth expanse of bank to the river. Their horses splashed chest-deep in the water, their necks out and bridles pulling as they crossed in the current. Adams saw the companies of dragoons drawn up outside the Fort, waiting his report before moving the wagons.

He and his men cleared the river and galloped towards the soldiers near the entrance to the Fort. Drawing close to them, he let go the reins and waved in signal for the wagons to move. The gates of the stockade were opened; the impatient horses in the first column burst from the Fort and, as the other wagons came hard behind them, the second and then the third column peeled in behind

and the long line of wagons careened back and forth with the swinging teams, boring in their own funnels of dust. The plume of its rose dirty and yellow-coloured and settled its tunnel along the moving train. As the head of the line of wagons passed him, Adams saw the companies of dragoons moving from formation beside the stockade to form protective screens along either side of the train.

The leading team was already going up the road along the banks of the river as Adams drew up beside Colonel Woolwine and some other officers. He felt a dizziness. His eyes blurred, focused differently. *Rest*, he thought. *Need it. After. Have to go back for him.*

'Great work!' the colonel said.

Adams tried to salute but his hand would not go up and he smiled vacantly at them in apology, almost lying on his stomach as he slid from his horse. He leaned against the gelding.

Colonel Woolwine hurried towards him. 'Where's your officer, Adams?' Adams waved his good arm foolishly, not communicating anything. 'Adams. What's the matter?'

'The lieutenant,' he said, the words coming from a long way off and very hard to pronounce. He stood up a little, away from the horse. 'The lieutenant,' he said again and paused, forming breath for the rest. 'He drew off the Injuns from us. Got cut off.'

His eyes. He squinted them. He looked at the overlapping Colonel Woolwine, at the triple edges of his three faces and bodies. A great tiredness took him and he caught the bridle to hold himself. 'Need some men. Need to go back.'

'You're in no shape. Here, help him,' somebody was telling somebody. He wanted to deny it. That's a lie, face. It was one of triple faces talking. One of them had to

understand his need. 'Colonel, let me take half my company and go up for him.' Yes, Adams thought agreeingly. Yes. 'You wouldn't have a chance, Mac. There are nine hundred braves up there. I haven't the right to spare any of you. I'm sorry, Mac.' You can't spare him, you mean. Lissen. I'm talkin'. Adams tried to see them. 'Sir, let me try. All volunteers.' That's the right face, Adams thought. Yes. Talk, face. 'I'm sorry, Mac. No. You'd never make it. It will take every one of us to get the wagons there safely. No.' Which face was that?

Then Sergeant Adams left the talk. He felt someone taking his arm, but his feet would not move to let him step away with them and he began falling, his six and a half feet of tallness seeming to crumple part by part, head, then shoulders, then chest, then waist, then hips, then knees. His body spiralled around him slowly, a fantasy of different sections moving and falling.

They laid him on the ground and one of them worked a blanket under him.

'My God, Colonel,' the man leaning over him said. 'His whole jacket is stiff and soggy with blood. He must have stopped and started bleeding a dozen times. Lord, he must have been bleeding off and on for hours.'

'Get a jimmy wagon up here on the double,' the colonel said. 'One of you bring the surgeon. He's looking after the other two wounded who came back with Adams. Hurry, man.'

When the last wagon had cleared the Fort and stretched after the others across the river plain, the remaining dragoons formed along the rear and the sides of the long train. The teamsters slapped the flat reins across the horses' rumps and drove as hard as they could. The traces

jingled and snapped along the horses' flanks, the wagons calt-wheeling the layered dust up with their heavy rimmed wheels. The surging caravan of horses and wagons and riding dragoons moved swiftly to the west and the Dalles, leaving the country once again to the Black Bears and the Klickitats.

There was no real pursuit by the Indians. Several times two or three small parties, which were not Yakimas, made harassing attacks on the wagons; but they did not want to engage, only hoped for stragglers separated from the train. When they had made fifteen miles, Colonel Woolwine slowed the pace to save the horses. There was a brief skirmish with about sixty Yakimas near Wild Horse Creek, and he moved the rear guard company farther behind the last wagons to get adequate warning of any large Yakima force. And then they moved off again.

EPILOGUE

SERGEANT ADAMS thought about Graham the five days he bumped and rolled in the rear of the jimmy wagon. When he was feeling better he raised up and gazed out the back towards the high-ranging Cascades and Walla Walla. But there was no smoke from burning lodges. There were only the timeless snowpeaks with the unending summer lengths of the Oregon skyline behind them and the inflated sun of full day.

The following morning they left Mud Springs. The wagons columned behind one another as they commenced the beginning climb through the heavier stands of black pines to the Dalles, leaving the sun-browned prairie and salt werk and perennial wormwood behind them. Adams fretted, pestering the surgeon. The officer finally waved his hand resignedly at the sergeant and rode off down the line of rumbling wagons in disgust. And Adams took to his horse again, his shoulder bandaged and the wrappings holding his arm to his chest.

He moved slowly in and out behind the different wagons until he found the one carrying Slip Roan. The blond southerner was lying propped up on rolled blankets on the tail board, and there was only a strip of white bandage no wider than one of their crossbelts around his head. Like all of them in the wagon train, Roan's face was layered with the choking road dust that boiled around the moving wagons. He saw Adams rein in behind and grinned.

'Morfin', Sarjint. You sure look like one of them Japanese coo-coons,' he said. 'All trussed up that way.'

Sergeant Adams smiled back, glad to be riding out in the sun again. He kicked the gelding closer until the horse's nose was almost touching the wagon board.

"Leastways I ain't layin' in a wagon like one of them old womenfolk," he told Roan.

"I got it made right well here." Roan paused as he jounced around, looking thoughtful. "Be easier, though on a horse," he admitted in his slurred tones.

They saw a squad of dragoons ride past them going the opposite way. A messenger was with them in infantry uniform. Adams turned back when they were gone.

"They sent two companies of infantry up from the south. I hear they're waitin' for us at Dalles. Must be some of 'em ridin' out to meet the old man."

Roan lifted up and looked through the opening behind the driver of the wagon. "We'll be gettin' there soon."

"Yeah."

"Whyn't you let the colonel tell her, Adams?" The other held himself up on the blankets, watching him.

Adams's narrow and bony features seemed even leaner than usual as he thought of it. It was the old man's job. He ought to let him. But like the day he did not want to stop beside her buggy, Adams felt a personal accountability for things he owed and thought somehow telling her himself might cancel that. And he believed Graham would want him to.

"Sometimes I get sick of the damned army. Sometimes I think I'll get out when my 'listment's up and never come back," Roan said.

Adams knew what Roan meant and nodded. But they both knew they would never leave the dragoons.

The leading wagons began entering the edges of Dalles and everyone began shouting, hurrahs sounding back along the long-winding length of the wagon train. Cou-

ples hugged each other and their children, some of them dancing around on the wagons and waving hats and yelling. Even the dragoons picked it up and a few of them in their blue uniforms and single crossbelts cantered up and down the column, waving to the excited settlers and missionaries in the wagons, and to the other civilians coming from the settlement. It wasn't military or very disciplined; and old Woolwine, riding back near the middle of the column, saw them and pretended he didn't.

The wagon beside Adams passed the first cabins of Dalles, and he pulled out and crossed through the weaving files of horsemen along the train. He rode by demonstrations of families reuniting, members embracing and crying or laughing or doing all together; soldiers leaning down from their horses and getting a surprise kiss; youngsters running alongside and holding the saddles or blankets. Someone had a small flag and was waving it from the top of one of the wagons.

Among the milling people and scurrying figures and moving horsemen, he saw Angela Graham. She was standing beside the road watching the passing wagons and riders, smiling and waving with the others, waiting as the first dragoons began riding past. Adams wanted to turn the gelding off between the wagons and pass on the other side.

As the F Company guidon flag and its leading dragoons approached her he saw her wave in excitement and start laughing. Adams pulled up his horse by her and reined to the side of the road and the moving column of wagons. He got off the gelding awkwardly.

She hesitated, then moved towards him quickly, smiling. 'Sergeant Adams, we're surely glad to see all of you. And the ones from Walla Walla. Isn't it wonderful?' She

looked at his bandaged shoulder. 'Oh, you've been hurt. I'm sorry.'

'It's gettin' well, ma'm.'

'Where is he?' she asked, eagerness running through her words. She looked along the column. 'Farther back along the wagons?'

'No, ma'm.'

The smile stayed but was smaller on her mouth. 'I missed him when he passed? I looked for him. I wanted to be here when we heard you were returnin' with the others from Walla Walla.'

Sergeant Adams glanced down at the toes of his jack-boots and nervously twisted the bridle lines between his big fingers, unable to say anything. Angela watched him, her expression changing a little as she sought his eyes, uncertainty coming in her own.

'He isn't hurt? He isn't hurt, is he?'

He looked down at her and it was hard to make himself tell her.

'Missus Graham, he was cut off from us in a raid on the Injuns.'

She stood very motionless and still. Maybe it was how he had said it, or his face and what she saw there. He realized she was looking past him.

'He's dead,' she said dully.

Adams waited. 'It probably don't help how you feel, Missus Graham. They wasn't nothin' anybody could do. I guess the lieutenant knew it when he drew 'em off so's we could get away.'

For a moment, standing there trying to believe, she wanted to tell him of Trew, the things they had never understood. The words formed in her mind. But she thought of Ed and what he believed and she knew he would not have wanted it.

'It came so soon,' she said, her eyes with their remote expression still going past him. The Oregon sun diamonded in them. 'He planned all the things he was going to do and thought of them so much. He said the army trained you for a purpose you could not always see at first, but you would know when it came. That a soldier always ought to believe it.' She stopped and looked at him, her very young eyes softening, and warm, and yet not crying. 'It came awfully soon for him.'

'I'll be glad to help you with anythin', ma'am,' Adams said.

'No. No, there's nothing, thank you,' she said, and her voice sounded tight and too controlled as she turned and started walking away. Adams called to her but she didn't look back. He led his horse a short way after her and stopped, watching her disappear in the excited and jostling people gathered along the road, a slender dark-haired girl who was unnoticed by the busy, laughing crowd.

Sergeant Adams got on the gelding and rode in the settlement after the rest of the company. He caught them passing where the lead wagons were being driven off the wide dirt street, the owners unhitching and moving the teams to the open field. He pulled abreast of the guidon rider and they rode to the old encampment near the block-house where the company would bivouac.

After unsaddling, Adams came up from the tack house and walked past the officers' cabin where the Grahams had stayed. He paused in front of it momentarily, thinking she would be coming from the settlement for the rest of their things; then he went in the empty orderly room. Slipping the buckle of his sword belt loose with his one hand, he hung it beside the door. He looked around the walls and at the window. Some of the men had begun singing down by the horse picket, and the sounds came

faintly through the window. 'Of being kin to the best of them, the dragon blue and died!'

A horse stopped outside and a dragoon entered the orderly room, carrying a dispatch bag. One of the regimental riders.

'Them infantry companies brought a couple dragoon officers up with 'em,' the soldier told him. 'Replacements. Your company gets one of 'em. The colonel wonders if you want to ride down with the adjutant and meet him.

Adams nodded absently; and after he left sat looking at nothing. He did not get up for his gun and sword or make any move to leave. But he knew he was going to. He had to. Only he wanted to sit by himself and think awhile before he did.